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Cripple Charley.



Old Bipus was in the act of kicking one of the young thieves, when a policeman laid his hand on his shoulder, and cried out: "What's all this row about?"

CRIPPLE CHARLEY.

CHAPTER I.

A QUEER CHARACTER ON A DRUNK—IN THE HANDS OF A ROUGH GANG—THE CRIPPLED BOOTBLACK—A STRANGE FRIENDSHIP.

He was as ugly a specimen of humanity as you could find in Congo or China.

There he goes staggering along the street, under the broiling sun, as saucy and independent as if he owned all the tenement houses and liquor stores in the block.

An old straw hat covered his head, a flannel shirt and a pair of army pants protected his body; while on his feet were a pair of shoes that had seen better days.

He was rip-tearing mad drunk, and he was bound to let the world of Baxter street know it; yes, and he was bound to get more rum, too.

"How are ye, fellers!" he cried, as he rolled into a liquor store on the corner, and addressed a gang of loungers waiting there for rum. "Come up and take a smile with me, I'm on a hurrah, I am. And I'm bound to have a high old time. Come up, all hands, and call for the best in the house."

The bartender looked suspiciously at the man and shook his head.

He took the old fellow for a bum; and well he might, as he did not appear to be master of money enough to pay for a glass of beer.

At the door of the liquor store a crowd of bootblacks, newsboys, and other urchins had assembled, and were peering anxiously in, now and then sending forth cries of derision and banter.

They had been following the old fellow for some time, and they looked upon him as a curiosity, and food for sport.

They argued that he was a dead-beat; and they wanted to see him bounced.

Yet there was one among the gang of urchins who felt much pity for the old tramp.

This was a bright-eyed, handsome lad, who hobbled along on a wooden stump, as he had lost one of his legs.

Some old poet or philosopher tells us that "a fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind."

This crippled lad had a fellow feeling for the old tramp inside, for he had noticed that the poor fellow had lost both arms.

The maimed man paid no attention to the shouts and jeers of the lads.

He was intent on filling himself with bad rum, and he was totally oblivious of the commotion he had created among the boys.

"What are yer going to have, fellows? sing out," cried the old fellow without arms, as he staggered up to the bar. "I'm agoing to have some old rye, and the best in the house."

"Not by a jug full," returned the bartender, "I ain't going to give an old snoozer like you no rum. You just up an' get out of this here shebang, or I'll bounce you."

"Bounce me!" cried the old tramp, indignantly, as he straightened himself up and looked daggers at the knight of the bar. "Tain't in your boots to do that, for the sugar. What do ye want to insult a feller for? Do you think I can't pay for my whiskey? Young feller, ye had better keep a civil tongue in your head. I want my whiskey, and I'm able to pay for it."

"Ha-ha-ha!" laughed the bartender. "You're a purty looking snoozer to talk fight to any one. You can't have no whiskey here till I see the spondulix. Come, put down or get out. Where do you keep your stamps when you have any?"

As the unfeeling brute spoke he pointed to the stumps, not more than two inches long, that were sticking out from the man's shoulders.

"Say, old fellow," cried one of the loungers, "won't you join our base ball club? By thunder, we'll make yer first base!"

"He'd ketch the ball on his potater-trap!" cried another. "Jest look at his mouth; 'tis big enough ter swaller the ball without chawing."

The old tramp turned, on the rowdies, and his eyes flashed angrily, and yet, at the same time, from out of their corners, there shone a merry, mischievous twinkle.

"Go on," thought the old fellow. "Before I'm through with yu snoozers I'll show yer a trick or two."

Again, turning to the bartender, he cried out:

"So you won't give me the drinks till I show the stamps?"

"Nary a time," was the bartender's reply. "You can't come any shinanagin on me. Down with the dust, or vamoose."

"So my face ain't good for a round?" remarked the old tramp.

There was something so indescribably humorous in the man's face and voice as he asked this question, that the bartender and the loungers burst out into fits of laughter.

"Good for a round!" yelled the bartender. "You got a gaul, ain't yer? Why, your whole carcass an' all that's on it isn't good for a five cent schooner of beer. I'll tell yer what ye'll do with that face of yours."

"What's that?" inquired the maimed man.

"There's a fellow down town that's got lots of stamps, but he's got such an ugly mug that he can't get a woman to look at him."

"What's that ere got to do with me?" interrupted the maimed man. "All this chin-music and no whiskey. Let's have a drink first, and then spin your yarn. I could spit ye sixpences enough to pay the round. I'm as dry as a Dutchman."

"Cheese it, old fellow," cried the bartender, as he winked at the loungers. "I'm going to put you on the road of making a good fortune."

"Fire ahead," remarked the old tramp; "we must all die some time. But 'tis an awful death when a fellow is dry. The undertaking business must be bully about here. I'll bet the drinks you kill more people with your tongue than your whiskey."

"You dry up, will ye?" cried the bartender. "I want to put you on a good lay."

"I'm a goner," said the tramp. "But let's hear yer proposition."

"Well," resumed the bartender, "that ugly fellow that keeps the shebang down town wants a wife in the worse way, and he's sweet on a pretty waiter girl what's working for him."

"He's so all-fired ugly that she won't look at him, though he's offered her everything, and that sets him near crazy."

"At last he plagued her so much, that she up and tells him that if he finds an uglier cuss in the city than himself, she'll marry him."

"What's that got to do with me?" again interrupted the impatient man. "Lord, will we ever get our whiskey?"

"Hold on," said the bartender, "I'm coming to the pint."

"A gill will do me," remarked the old tramp.

"This ugly old rooster," resumed the bartender, with a smile, "is so anxious to get married that he offers a thousand dollars to any coon who'll cart along a feller what's uglier than himself."

The old fellow looked earnestly at the bartender for a moment, and there was a merry twinkle in his expressive eye.

"Why in the thunder don't yer take that offer up yourself, pardner?" he cried, addressing the bartender, while he winked at the loungers. "See here, old fellow, I've traveled all over this here world of ours, and an uglier, more God-forsaken frontispiece than yours, I never did lay my eyes on. You slap on yer hat, go down and let that gal have a squint at yer, an' the thousand dollars is yer own."

A yell of applause burst from the loungers, as they clapped their hands and shouted:

"Sold again!"

"He's one too many for yer, Mike!"

"Bust me if he's a slouch!"

"Hold yer racket," cried the worsted bartender, as he joined in the laugh at his own expense.

"I acknowledge the corn, I'm sold. What will ye have, fellows? I'll do out."

"No yer don't," interrupted the old tramp. "I called for these here drinks, an' I'm a-going to pay for them. I ain't no sucker if my uniform is a little faded. Hold on there, an' I'll show you where I keeps my stamps."

All eyes were turned on the old man as he stepped back from the counter.

They were all anxious to see how a man with-

out arms could manage to produce money from his person.

And not one present watched the movements of the tramp more eagerly than the crippled newsboy of whom we have spoken.

"I thought it rough," muttered the lad, "to toddle around on this stump. But, by Jingo, that poor fellow is in a thousand times worse fix than me. I wonder how he makes it go at all, with nary an arm or hand to help him?"

The old tramp was not long in showing them how he "made it go."

Standing for a moment in the room, he sprang up and turned a complete summersault; and the next instant he was sitting on the floor.

Then he flung off one of his shoes, and exhibited a huge foot, with toes almost as long and as supple as the fingers of a lady's hand.

Up went the foot under the bosom of his flannel shirt, and out came a five-dollar bill clinging to his toes.

Another spring, and the man was on his feet, the bill still clutched in the toes.

A shout of applause burst from the loungers, while the newsboys and bootblacks outside yelled with delight.

"There's the spondulix," cried the maimed man, as he lifted his foot and laid the bill on the counter before the astonished bartender. "I told yer I had the rocks. There's no beat about me. Let's take a drink, fellers."

"By giminy," thought the crippled newsboy outside, as he watched the man, "if that old coon an' me was to travel together, we'd make a big team. I must lay for him, an' strike up an acquaintance. He's a rouser—he is."

There was no hesitancy about giving the drinks when the bartender saw the money.

The old fellow could have all the drinks he wanted while the money lasted.

The bartender filled out the fiery beverage, and the maimed man, seizing the glass between his teeth, drank it down.

And the old tramp was not at all sparing of his five dollar bill.

He drank glass after glass of whiskey, and the loungers tipped glasses with him every time, calling him "a tramp," and "an old brick," and "a hunky boy," and all the endearing terms in the vocabulary of the roughs.

Your regular bar-room loungeer would drink with the Old Boy himself, even if his tail were rubbing their coats.

The old tramp was half seas over when he entered the bar-room, and now he was getting to the fighting pitch.

"Where did you lose your arms, old fellow?" inquired one of the loungers. "Down in a coal mine, or blasting rock?"

"I lost them there arms of mine," was the reply, as the old fellow gazed indignantly at the rough; "where ye'll never lose your'n."

"Where was that, old top?" was the inquiry.

"Fighting the country's battles, ye sneaking bounty jumper," replied the old fellow.

A shout of laughter greeted this reply; and the vengeful rough muttered something about "putting a head on the old snoozer."

The old fellow's random shot had hit the mark: the loungeer was a bounty jumper during the war.

"Put a head on me!" cried the old fellow, as he faced the chagrined rowdy. "Tain't in yer boots, ye dirty sucker. I can lick yer. I can clear out yer whole crowd, if ye give me a living show. One at the time, and I'll kick the heads av the whole caboodle of ye."

"Go way from me," said the rowdy, as he held up his hand, and pushed the drunken man.

"I don't want to tackle a cripple like you. Go way, I say, or I'll smash your snoot. I won't take no more of your slack, I won't. You're an old fraud, you are. I don't believe you ever shouldered a musket in your life. You're one of the shysters what travels around and make stamps putting up for a soldier. That's how you makes your money."

"You're an infernal liar," shouted the old soldier as he dashed at the rowdy, head foremost.

The attack was so sudden and unexpected that

ere the man could raise his hands to defend himself he was struck in the breast and sent headlong to the floor.

"Boost him! knock him over! fire him out," were the cries that arose from the friends of the stricken man, as they saw him lying senseless where he had fallen.

The old soldier heard the vengeful cries ringing around him, and drunk as he was, he comprehended his danger.

Yet as he stood there among that infuriated and treacherous gang, not a quiver of fear was perceptible on his countenance.

That armless man did not know what the word fear meant; it was not in his dictionary.

Drunk or sober, with arms or without, he would face a regiment of the enemy or an army of roughs, with as much confidence as he would march out to a dress parade.

The crippled bootblack at the door saw the danger to which the old soldier was exposed, and he trembled for his safety.

He saw that brute of a bartender lift a soda-water bottle from the stand and hurl it at the maimed man.

He saw that the bottle struck him on the head and laid him low, and he heard the fiendish cries of the roughs as they sprang on the maimed man.

"Let's go through him," cried one, as he sprang towards the victim. "He's got more stamps about him."

"Kick his whole head off first!" yelled a drunken ruffian, who had been imbibing on the five dollars until he was ripe for any crime.

"Shame—shame!" cried the crippled bootblack, as he sprang into the room, and flung himself on the old soldier, and endeavored to shield him.

"Yer wouldn't go ter lick a feller who ain't got no arms to defend himself. 'Tain't fair nohow. Let up on him. He's full of gin, an' he doesn't know what he's doing. Let him alone, an' I'll take care of him. Come along with me, old Bipus. Let us get out of this ranch, or they won't leave yer a stitch of clothes."

The rowdies drew back, for, whiskey-crazed and depraved as they were, the words of the lad had an effect on them.

It was a strange scene.

There lay the drunken, maimed man at the mercy of a gang of desperate roughs, and over him, like a guardian angel, stood the bright-eyed boy with the wooden stump.

If the words of the boy had an effect on the rowdies, they had more than a soothing influence on the poor, maimed man.

As the blood streamed over his face from the cut on his head, he looked up into the face of the boy, and muttered:

"You're a trump, yer are. Not that I care a continental for the whole party of them, if they gave a feller a living show."

"Come with me," returned the boy. "I'll see to yer, boss, and have yer cut fixed."

As the boy spoke he drew forth a handkerchief, and endeavored to wipe away the blood from the face of the forlorn creature.

"Yes; I'll go with yer," returned the old soldier. "Yer have an honest face, and 'tisn't often we sees one in a crowd like this."

As the man spoke he spang to his feet, and gazed defiantly at the rowdies around.

He was partially sobered now, and as he moved out of the door, with the crippled lad at his side, he noticed that his young protector had lost a leg.

"So young and so purty, and crimped, too," he muttered; "but I'll stand by yer through thick and thin, young feller. Yer did me a good turn, and I won't forget it."

"We'll be chums, won't we?" cried the boy.

"You bet we will," was the man's reply, as a tear stole down his rugged cheek. "We'll be chums forever and a day. March along now. I am getting sober again. Curse the rum."

Thus it was that those maimed creatures formed a friendship that was never severed.

Down the crowded street to his own humble room the lad led his uncouth friend, paying no heed to the cries and jeers of his companions.

Stopping at a drug store, the old soldier had his cut dressed.

"A bad gash," remarked the druggist, as he laid some court-plaster on the wound.

"'Tisn't the first I've had," was the soldier's reply, "an' I'll get over it afore I'm twice married."

CHAPTER II.

THE DAY AFTER THE SPREE—CHARLEY'S STORY—THEN OLD BIPUS SPINS HIS YARN—PLANNING FOR A TRAMP—HO, FOR THE BIG SHOW.

ALL night long the old soldier tumbled and

tossed in the humble lodging-room to which he had been conveyed by his friend.

In the morning he had a bursting headache, and the first thing he demanded was a cocktail.

"What's your name?" he inquired, as he turned to the lame lad.

"Charley," was the reply. "They call me Cripple Charley."

"And yer took charge of this old hunk last night, when a crowd set on him?"

"Oh, that's nothing," replied the boy. "I hated to see them abuse a fellow what was under the weather a little."

"I was as drunk as a lord, sonny. But it don't happen for a long spell again. 'Twas one of my periodicals, as they calls them. See here, Charley, you just clap your hand under my shirt, haul out some stamps, go out and fetch me a gin cocktail, and get some breakfast for the pair of us. Then we'll have a talk."

Charley hastened away for the reviver and the food; and they both sat down and enjoyed a hearty meal.

"From the capers I cut yesterday, Charley," said the old soldier, "you must take me for a queer Dick; and so I am. When I take liquor, it makes a confounded fool of me. Charley, how are yer fixed? and how did yer lose that leg?"

"Oh, that's nothing," replied the lad, as he held up the stump. "I can toddle along with this stump 'most as well as if 'twas reg'lar. It don't worry me much, and I can paddle along bully."

"Ain't yer got no home—no father or mother?" inquired the man.

"Nary a home but this," was the reply. "Nary a father or mother. Or at leastwise I have never been introduced to them."

The rough old soldier was becoming more and more interested in the handsome lad.

"Tell a feller," he said, "all about yer life. I've taken a liking to ye."

"'Taint much to tell," replied the boy. "I was dragged up in the orphan asylum till I was about ten. Then I skeddaddled and sold newspapers. One day a fellow swiped a pair o' boots, and as he was shooting off with 'em the cops made for him. He chucked them to me, making believe I was in with him. The cops they took me in. Then I was sent to the Protectory for awhile, but I burst me chains one day, and became a free-born American bootblack."

Charley struck an attitude as he spoke, and his bright eye glistened with merriment.

"You called me old Bipus yesterday," remarked the old soldier; "what did you call me that for?"

"Why, yer see, when I was up at Westchester College, I got a little edecation, though I most forget it all now. I remember that a biped is a two-legged—"

The boy paused, and it was evident that he did not like to offend his new friend.

"Go on there," cried the old soldier, as a droll smile stole over his face.

"A two-legged animal, sir," faltered the boy, as his eyes were turned on the maimed body of the man; "I didn't mean to offend you, sir."

"No offense, Charley; sarved me right; I was making a beast of myself at the time. Call me old Bipus, 'twill do as well as anything else, and yet I had a good name once."

The old man sighed; and it was evident that he was thinking of brighter days.

"It struck me so queer to see you working around without yer arms, sir," remarked Charley, in a half apologetic tone, "that I couldn't help calling it to ye. Tell me yer name, and I won't call it any more."

"No—no," returned the old man; "don't call me anything else, or I'll put a head on yer with my foot. I likes yer, my sonny. There's something square and decent in yer face. And yer like myself somewhat, yer maimed, and yer got no friends. How did yer lose yer leg?"

"Oh," returned the boy, "'twas down on the docks one day that little Tim Murphy dropped over, and he couldn't swim; when I saw him I plunged in without thinking, and I struck my leg against a spike in the water."

"Thunder!" interrupted the old man. "That was rough on yer, Charley."

"Didn't hurt a bit, sir, at the time. I dove and got Tim by the hair, and lugged him to the dock. That's all I remember, for I caved in after that. When I came to the leg was gone—buried in Potter's Field."

"Yer a brave fellow, Charley," cried the old man.

"How did you lose your arms, sir?" inquired the boy.

"I'll tell yer, me boy, in the shake of a lamb's tail," responded the man.

"Yer must know, Charley, that in my young days I was somewhat of a rounder, though I had a good father and mother. I run off to sea, and knocked about the world for a long spell."

"At last I came back and settled down, and got married; and we had a nice little girl."

"Well, the war broke out, and I joined the first crowd that went off to defend Washington, leaving my wife and little one with the old folks."

"I was in the cavalry; and a bully life it was, dashing here and there after the enemy. I rode with Custer, sonny; and a dashing soldier he was. I was no slouch then, though I blow my own horn."

"All through the war I stuck to the work, without once getting a chance to get back to York here to see my wife and little gal."

"When the war was over, I shot home to see the folks; but I didn't find them."

"Dead?" muttered Charley, in a kindly tone.

"Dead to me," replied the man, sadly. "My wife had made off with a fellow that I thought was my best friend, and I never saw them since."

The man spoke in an earnest manner, and his voice was low and even plaintive; while not an expression fell from his lips that would lead one to suppose that he had not always been accustomed to good society.

"I was so disgusted with life," he continued, "that I enlisted again, and went out on the plains against the redskins."

"One day I went out with a party of four scouting around, when we were ambushed by a band of the Indians."

"We fought them all day, and drove them off at last, with the aid of some of the troops. But I got two of their poisoned arrows in one arm, and one in the other."

"When we reached the fort, the surgeon said I must lose my arms. So off they went. And that's how I became a Bipus, Charley."

"Did you ever find your daughter?" inquired the lad, who seemed to be very much interested in the soldier's story.

"I've been hunting around ever since," was the man's reply, "trying to find them. I've tramped all over the country looking for her—looking for the cuss that stole my wife. I'm a wreck, Charley, and I know it. I ain't got heart for anything but to find my girl and kill that villain."

"Have you looked for her in this city, sir?" inquired the lad.

"Everywhere," was the reply. "And tomorrow I'm off on the tramp again."

"I'll go with you, sir," cried Charley. "I'm tired of New York. 'Tis getting played out. The Garibaldians, as we fellers calls the Italians, have cut business down to nothing. Take me along."

"You bet your boots I will, Charley," cried the soldier, with a kindly smile. "I've been on the lookout for a chum like you for a long time; I ain't busted, either. I've got three months' pension here in my breast, and some more besides. So we won't be hard up for a while."

"I can make a stamp with the brush," said the boy.

"There's plenty of fun for us outside of this crowded city. Hurrah for a tramp. We'll have plenty of fun. I say, Bipus! Oh, giminy!"

The boy held down his head; he was afraid he had offended his new chum by calling him that strange name.

"You call me Bipus, Charley," cried the old man, as he laughed at the term. "Old Bipus, if you like. 'Twas the first name you put on me, and let it rip. I ain't got no pride in me, sonny. Bipus let it be, an' you love me."

"'Tis well, Horatio," exclaimed the lad, as he once more struck a tragic attitude. "A rose by any other name would smell—"

"Cheese it, Charley," interrupted the old fellow, as he smiled at the boy. "Don't come any of your tragics on me. Let's talk about our tramp."

"Fire ahead, old chum. I'm all attention."

"Well, Charley," resumed the old soldier, "you see I have my pension to help me to live on; and besides, I have the papers here in my breast that entitles me to so many acres of land. Now, listen to my plans for the future."

"All attention, Bipus," cried Charley, who was getting jubilant at the prospect before him.

"We'll set on a tramp for my girl; and when we find her, we'll be off and settle down on the farm. What do you think of that for an idea?"

"A bully one," returned Charley. "Where will we make for first?"

"We'll try a Centennial trip to Philadelphia; an from there we'll work our way out west."

"Glor-i-ous!" exclaimed Charley. "I want to take a squint at the big show; and there'll be a show for us to make some stamps there, too. See if we don't."

"We'll have to travel on the cheap," remarked the old soldier. "Twon't do to run out of funds. Who knows but I might strike my little girl!"

CHAPTER III.

OUT ON THE TRAMP—UNDER THE GREENWOOD TREE—A HARD CROWD—THE FIGHT IN THE BAGGAGE CAR.

It did not take old Bipus and Cripple Charley long to make their preparations for starting out on their long tramp.

They had few adieus to make; and they were not much troubled about looking after their heavy trunks.

Charley was in a splendid humor.

The lame boy had found a companion to whom he had already become attached; and they were about starting out together on a journey to visit the places about which he had read so much.

And old Bipus was in excellent humor also.

It was a strange sensation for him to find his heart warming toward a human being; and he had taken a great fancy to Cripple Charley.

Side by side they strode down Center street to the park, and then down Broadway to the Jersey City ferry.

Many an eye was turned after the queer-looking pair as they walked along, and many a jest was made at their expense.

Charley's blacking-box was slung over his shoulder, and in his hand, wrapped up in a bundle, he carried all the clothes that he possessed.

Old Bipus had a knapsack fastened around his neck; and in it was stored provisions enough to last them a day or two.

It was a fine, cool morning, and the two cripples determined to tramp it on foot to Newark, rest there during the heat of the day, and then trust to luck for getting a free ride and a night's lodging in some freight car dashing on for Philadelphia.

"Never been on a tramp afore, Charley?" inquired old Bipus, as they pushed leisurely along the plank road to Newark.

"Nary a tramp, Bipus," was Charley's reply.

"Then you've got a treat afore you, sonny; 'tis rough, I tell yer, when you ain't got any money; but we'll try and keep a supply. The great danger is, that when we're taking a snooze in the car at night, some of the old stagers might go through us. We'll have to have our eyes skinned, I tell yer. We'll meet many a hard crowd afore we reach our farm."

Then old Bipus told Charley about some of his adventures on the western railroads, where he had been tramping in search of his daughter.

The tramps met with no adventure worth recording during their journey along the plank road, and about noon they reached a shady grove outside of Newark.

"We'll lay off here, Charley," said old Bipus, "and we'll try some grub. When it gets dark, we'll make for the depot, and select our sleeping car for the night."

It was a novel scene to look at—the maimed tramps stretched under the tree, Charley cutting away at a sandwich, feeding his helpless friend, and then placing the tin can of coffee to his mouth, while old Bipus smiled on the boy, and chatted away merrily.

Tramps, indeed! They were as happy enjoying their humble lunch as if they had been seated at Delmonico's.

Just as they finished their lunch, and were about to stretch their limbs for a rest, they heard loud voices on the road outside.

Peeping through the bushes, they saw a party of young fellows tramping along towards Newark.

And a hard-looking crowd they were.

"I know that gang," whispered Cripple Charley to his companion, "and they're the worst you ever saw."

"Where are they going, do you suppose, Charley?" asked old Bipus. "Are they on the tramp?"

"They're on the steal, you bet, wherever they're bound for," replied Charley. "Do you see that fellow with the squint eye and crooked nose? Why, that's the snide what got me into trouble about the boots. Oh, he's a hard crowd."

"I guess they're on a tramp to the Centennial," remarked old Bipus.

"That's their lay out," said Charley. "I heard them put up the job the other night. They're young dock thieves, they are. And see the snoozers traveling with blacking boxes, so that they can pass off for decent mechanics. Wouldn't I like to put a head on that skunk, Mouser."

"They look like tough nuts to handle," remarked the old soldier.

"That Mouser is a ripper in a fight," said Charley. "And there's Possum Pete and Skinny Myers and two of the Burling Slip gang with them. You bet they'll make things lively when they gets to the Centennial. You bet your bottom dollar they don't spend a nickel on the road. And you can take your oath that they'll go through more than one greeny afore they sees the big city again."

"They sha'n' go through us, Charley," said the old soldier. "I've made away with harder-looking Christians than them afore now, though I don't want to blow."

"Oh, I don't reckon they'll tackle us," said Charley. "That's not their game. They're after the young fellows that's going to the great Centennial Base Ball Match. Though they wouldn't think a pin about tackling us if they thought they'd make a haul."

"Let them try it on, sonny," remarked the old soldier, in a quiet way, while a peculiar smile passed over his face. "They might wake up the wrong passengers, for all we're cripples."

"Oh," replied Charley, "I can handle this stump of mine first class. 'Tis as good as a club in a plug-muss. I've knocked over many a snoozer with it."

"We'll keep our weather eye open for them, Charley. And now let's take a snooze."

'Neath the shade of the trees the tramps slumbered till evening, and then they arose and proceeded on the journey.

They stopped at a lager-beer saloon and procured some refreshments, and when it was dark they started for the railroad depot, to look out for a train bound for the Centennial city.

Old Bipus and Charley hung around the depot for some time, watching the crowds that were hurrying on to the Centennial sports.

At length the veteran tramp spied a freight train, attached to which were some empty baggage cars.

"That's our bunk," he whispered to his companion. "Let's get in there and settle down for the night."

They stole quietly into the empty car, felt their way to a corner, and commenced to make preparations for a quiet night's rest.

The old soldier flung off his shoes and stretched on the floor, with his knapsack for a pillow.

Charley lay beside him with his blacking-box under his head.

The train had scarcely started, when the sharp ear of the old soldier caught the murmur of voices in the other corner of the car.

"Lay low," he whispered to Charley. "We have some fellow passengers. Make believe to sleep, but keep your eyes skinned."

Charley obeyed the instructions given him, and the next moment they were playing possum, with ears and eyes on the alert.

They had not a great while to wait, for no sooner had the train got well under way than the other occupants of the car commenced to congratulate one another on procuring a free ride.

"Say, Mouser," cried one, "we're all hunk for Philadelphia now."

"All secure, Possum," was the reply. "Strike a light, and let's see what kind of a hotel we're in. I want to take a smoke."

"Bipus," whispered Charley into his companion's ear, "that's the crowd we saw to-day."

"Lay low," was the cautious reply.

One of the young rounders pulled out a small dark lantern, struck a light with a match, and soon the glare of the lamp was turned on the pretended sleepers.

"Halloo!" cried the fellow addressed as Possum Pete, as he looked at the two tramps. "Who in thunder are these here fellows?"

As he spoke, he approached the pretended sleepers, followed by his companions.

"I know them," said Mouser. "That's the old bum what was on a tare in Baxter street yesterday and raising merry h—; and that other snoozer is Cripple Charley."

"Let's bounce 'em," cried Possum Pete. "They ain't got no business in our car."

"Hist!" whispered Mouser, as he drew his companions aside. "That old bum what ain't

got no arms has lots of stamps. I seed them under his shirt. Let's go through them."

"Bully for you, Mouser!" returned one of his companions. "That's the game. We might as well make a haul here as anywheres. Go for them."

The old soldier and Charley felt that they were in a bad box.

The train was rattling along at the rate of thirty miles an hour, and they knew that if the gang attacked them they would not be able to get any assistance.

The old soldier managed to whisper a few words into the boy's ear:

"I'm your ten-pin," was the whispered reply from the boy. "Let's have it out at once."

"Charge is the word," responded the old soldier, as he prepared to spring to his feet. "Give it to the landsharks right and left."

And, springing to their feet together, they did charge with a vengeance.

The young thieves were just in the act of rushing on their intended victims, when in among them dashed the two cripples.

It was wonderful to see how old Bipus used his head and legs, while Charley struck out right and left with his fists, and the wooden stump flew about like a flail.

At the first onset old Bipus struck one of the young thieves full in the face with his head, sending him howling and bleeding to the corner of the car.

Then he dashed at another, and lifting his foot, he fetched him on the nose, and sent him reeling beside his companion.

Charley first tackled Possum Pete, and dealt him a severe blow on the eye; and then wheeling around, he made for Mouser.

At the first onslaught the young thieves were taken by surprise, as they were not all prepared for the sudden attack.

But they were not such cowards as to give in without a hard fight; and muttering fierce oaths and cries of vengeance, they dashed at the cripples.

Mouser and another fellow sprang on Charley, while Possum Pete and two of his friends tried to close in on old Bipus and bear him to the ground.

At this moment the conductor, lamp in hand, appeared at the door; and a scene of uproar and confusion was presented to him.

Old Bipus had just knocked down one of the assailants by giving him a vigorous kick in the stomach.

Holding Possum Pete's hand in his mouth, he was kicking away at his face with his bare foot, while the young thief was howling with pain, and struggling to get away.

Charley had Mouser grabbed by the throat, and was punching his head in fine style, while at the same time he belabored his other opponent over the head with his wooden stump.

In the corner of the car two of the thieves were howling with pain, and endeavoring to stop the blood that was flowing from their wounds, while another fellow was trying to get out of the reach of the crippled leg.

It was a scene of the wildest confusion—a regular plug-muss—and the conductor enjoyed it.

"Go it, ye beggars!" he cried, as he stood at the door. "When the muss is over, I'll collect your fares."

The sound of the conductor's loud voice soon put a stop to the fight.

Old Bipus let go the finger he had held in his mouth, and Possum Pete retired to a corner, holding his injured hand in his mouth, and muttering curses.

Charley flung his adversary to the floor, and approached his fellow tramp.

The rest of the thieves sneaked away to a corner of the car, muttering threats against their late adversaries.

"I guess they won't tackle this crowd again in a hurry," said old Bipus.

"You may bet your boots on that," responded the plucky lad.

"Tickets, gentlemen—tickets!" yelled the conductor, as he cast a comical glance at the rough crowd.

CHAPTER IV.

A CONDUCTOR IN TROUBLE—THE YOUNG THIEVES ON THE RAMPAGE—THE FIGHT IN THE DARK—THE TRIANGULAR STAND—FLOORED BY THE GANG.

"FARES, gentlemen, fares," again sang out the conductor, as, holding up the lamp, he gazed at the rough-looking gang before him.

"We're dished out of our sleeping-car and free

ride, Charley," muttered old Bipus. "Confound the skunks. If they hadn't tackled us, he'd never have looked in here at all. We've got to git, sure."

"Hang the luck," returned Charley; "but we knocked spots out of that crowd. Hear them yell!"

The young thieves had assembled together in one corner of the car, and their cries of pain could be heard above the rattling of the cars.

"What's all this row about, anyhow?" inquired the conductor, as he looked on the maimed tramps and then on their adversaries. "Having a free fight as well as trying to smouge a free ride, eh?"

"We weren't doing nothin' to 'em," growled Possum Pete, as he looked toward the cripples, "when they set on us like mad, and gouged and bit, and kicked our heads off—the darned snoozers."

"That's a whopper, you low sneak," cried Cripple Charley, turning to the conductor. "That ere gang, sir—what's a lot of dock thieves from York—wanted to go through us when they thought we was snoozing there in the corner; and we went for them, we did. Old Bipus and me can knock spots out of them suckers."

"That's so, boss," put in old Bipus; "tisin't likely that two fellows like us would tackle that gang, only they put on us. Is it, boss?"

The conductor burst out laughing as he replied:

"I shouldn't think it would be. Why, you ain't got no arms; and this youngster has got a stump leg. A nice party to tackle such a crowd. But you did pitch in. Ha—ha—ha! It was the highest old row I ever did see. But, out with your fares, as I don't suppose any of you stopped at the ticket office."

The young thieves had by this time somewhat recovered from the fight; and they were, in their own peculiar way, making arrangements to resist the conductor.

They saw that he was alone, and they determined to use force if necessary, rather than pay for the trip.

They did not relish the idea of tramping it at that hour of the night.

"Let's boost him," whispered Mouser. "We ain't got no stamps for railroads."

"We'll chuck him off the train," returned Possum Pete, "if he puts on any of his lugs with us. We ain't going to waste our dimes on that list. He's on the knock down, he is."

"We're able to tackle him," remarked Skinny Myers, in a low tone; "the snoozer ain't got no brakeman with him, and then those cripples are in the same boat. They're dead-heading it. They'll chip in with us if we go for the conductor."

"We'll lay them out after," muttered Possum Pete. "I'll never let up on 'em till I get hunky for this here cut on my head—curse 'em."

The conductor saw the threatening looks that were cast on him by the young thieves, and he knew he had to deal with a bad lot.

His first thought was to summon assistance, and put them out of the car at the first station, should they refuse to pay their fares.

Then he reasoned that it would never do to show the white feather, so, putting on a bold front he advanced on the gang, lamp in hand, exclaiming:

"Come—come. Out with your fares. You can't dead-head on this road. That's played out. Launch out your stamps right off."

"How much?" inquired Possum Pete, as he put his hand in his pocket, as if to draw out some money.

"Let me see," said the the conductor. "Well, I won't be hard on you. I'll take you on to Philadelphia for a dollar and a half a head, though it's against the rules to ride on this baggage car."

"Thunder!" said Possum Pete. "But you got a cheek. Do ye think we're millionaires? Ye can't get any such money out of me, or any of this gang."

"He wants to knock down," yelled Mouser. "Let him go bag his head."

"You're a nice snoozer," cried another. "Wanting to make a haul out of a lot of orphans like us. Say, fellers, let's bounce him, if he puts on any more lugs with us."

While this talk was going on some of the young roughs had slipped around toward the floor of the car, in order to block the conductor should he attempt to call for assistance.

Old Bipus and Charley watched the movements of the conductor and the young roughs.

They knew that the gang would resist the payment of money for the ride; and they saw, from the determined manner of the conductor, that he would enforce his claims.

"There's going to be another row, Bipus,"

said Charley, in a low tone. "Them fellows are going for that conductor. Will we pitch in, and give the boss a hand?"

"Taint none of our funeral yet," returned old Bipus. "You just wait till you see what turns up. That conductor's no slouch."

The conductor was not in the least frightened by the young thieves, though he saw that they meant to offer resistance.

"Hand out you fares, you young scamps," he cried, in an angry voice, "or I'll dump you right off here in this swamp. Shell out or get out. D'ye hear?"

"Oh, you go take a tumble," cried Mouser.

"Do you take us for flats?"

"Go bag your head!" yelled Possum Pete.

"You want to get rich in a hurry."

"Put a head on him!" sang out Skinny Myers.

"Let's run the train ourselves."

"If these here rips get the best of the conductor," whispered old Bipus to his companion, "they'll go for us again. They're down on us now."

"Let's give him a show," returned the chivalrous Charley. "Tisin't the right thing to let that gang fall on one man, no how."

The conductor saw that he was in for a row, and laying the lantern down, he sprang for the bell-rope.

But Skinny Myers was beforehand with him.

That young thief pulled a knife out of his pocket, and springing up, he cut the rope.

"That game is blocked," yelled the rough, as he stood at the entrance of the car, brandishing the knife at the conductor. "You just simmer down now, or I'll jab this into you."

The conductor stood for a moment irresolute.

Though he was a brave man, he hesitated for a moment in attacking the desperate gang before him.

The train was rattling along at a rapid rate, and he knew that it would be useless to call for assistance.

He also knew that the car was the last of the train, and that they had a long distance to run before they reached the next station.

The roughs saw that the conductor hesitated, and they took his hesitation for fear.

"Pitch into him, fellows," cried Possum Pete.

"Let's lay him out. They won't miss him till we get to the next station, and then we can skeddaddle afore they can lay hands on us. We'll have to tramp it anyway, if we let him out now."

"Knock him over and silence him," cried another. "We can go through him, too; he's got lots of stamps with him."

"Hold up, fellows," cried Mouser. "We'll let up on him if he swears to let us slide. Say, boss, you let us slide and we'll let you down easy. We're tough nuts, we are; and we don't stand any shenanagin."

The conductor's eyes flashed with rage, as he glared around on the young desperadoes.

"You infernal young rowdies," he cried, "do you take me for a fool? You don't scare me worth a cent. I'll knock thunder out of the whole of you; and then I'll have you clapped into a Jersey prison, where you'll get nicely sweetened. Come, this thing has gone far enough. Come down with your stamps, and don't give me any more chin music."

Shouts of derision burst from the gang on hearing the conductor's ultimatum.

"Bust him in the snoot!" "Chaw him up!"

"Lay him out!" and a dozen other choice expressions of friendship fell on the man's ears, as the young roughs closed around him.

The conductor flung out his arms right and left, and forced his way to the side of the car.

The conductor had been an old New York fireman, and in his young days he had been engaged in many a fight in which he had to stand against superior numbers.

He saw that it was impossible for him to retreat through the door, as four of the young roughs blocked the way.

In fact, the brave man had no notion of beating a retreat at all.

He despised his opponents, and he was determined to punish them.

Yet he took the precaution of gaining the side of the car, and, placing his back to it, so that he could not be assailed from the rear, he waited the onslaught, feeling assured that he could floor the young roughs one by one as they approached him.

"Go for him," yelled Mouser, as he faced the conductor. "Let's crowd him down. Rush in on him all together."

With yells that would appal the bravest heart, the young rowdies sprang on the man from all sides.

Standing there at bay, the conductor struck

out right and left, knocking some of the young rascals down.

But the young thieves were infuriated now.

They were smarting under the punishment inflicted on them by the cripples; and they were determined to overpower the conductor, and rob him, and then turn once more to their old opponents.

"We'll take a hand in now, Charley," cried old Bipus, as he sprang to the conductor's side.

"Go it, old hoss," returned Charley, as he followed his companion.

"Give it to 'em, boss," yelled old Bipus, as, with flashing eyes and grinning face, he kicked away at the conductor's assailants.

When the young roughs saw that the cripples ranged themselves on the side of the conductor, they knew that they had a hard fight before them; yet they were in for it now, and there was no such thing as backing down.

"Douse the glimmer!" shouted Mouser, who seemed to assume the leadership of the gang.

"What's the racket?" yelled Possum Pete, as he sprang at the conductor's lamp, and blew it out.

Then all was darkness in the car; and silence reigned also for some moments.

"I say, boss," whispered old Bipus to the conductor, "ye jest clap yer back to mine. Charley, ye git here to the right. We'll form a kind of triangular square, and blow the young varmints as they come for us."

"All right, old man," returned the conductor, as he obeyed the soldier's instructions. "I'll remember this for you—see if I don't."

"Charley," whispered the old soldier, "don't let the cusses get in on yer. If they once get us down, they'll go in for kicking the head off us. Watch yer P's and Q's, sonny."

"Hunkydory," replied the lad. "I'll lay them out with this stump as fast as they come near me, old fellow. Don't worry about this child."

"What are the suckers up to?" inquired old Bipus, in the same low tone. "They're going to play some trick on us, sure—"

Old Bipus did not finish the sentence save with an oath, for a bootblack's box struck him full in the face.

Then a yell, as if a lot of fiends were out on a spree, fell on the ears of the conductor and his friends, as a perfect shower of boxes and brushes were rained against them.

The conductor was knocked to the floor, Charley was sent staggering against the side of the car, and old Bipus was almost stunned by the blow on the head; yet he held his ground for the time, and let fly his foot right and left in the hope of fetching some of his assailants.

The young roughs did not give them a moment's rest.

With another yell, and as if acting in concert, they dashed on the conductor and the cripples.

They were fairly maddened now, as they thought that they had their opponents at their mercy.

Your young rough is never so fiendish as when he knows he has got his opponent at a great disadvantage; and then he shows about as much mercy as would the murderous Sioux.

By the gleam of the little dark lantern which one of them still held in his hand, they saw that the conductor was down.

Three of them rushed on him, and commenced kicking him about the head and breast in a beastly manner.

The brave fellow did not utter a word, but made desperate efforts to regain his feet, shielding his face with his hands, and kicking up at his assailants.

Three more of the gang rushed on old Bipus from behind, and pulled his legs from under him.

When Charley saw, by the dim light, that his friends were down, he dashed at those who were assailing old Bipus, and struck at them desperately with legs and hands.

At this moment the engine's shrill whistle announced that the train was approaching a station.

Charley was fighting manfully against the young thieves, the conductor was struggling with the fiends who were kicking away at him; while old Bipus, roaring like a mad bull as he lay on the floor, was kicking away at his opponents.

"Floor the cripple!" cried Mouser, as he dashed at Charley, and seized his wooden stump. "Knock 'em over, fellows, and go through them. Quick—quick, the train will soon stop!"

A blow on the head, and Cripple Charley was stretched beside old Bipus and the conductor.

Then with the dexterity of old footpads some of the gang ran their hands through the pockets

of the conductor and under the shirt of old Bipus, while the others held them down or struck at them with their fists and feet.

Charley and his brave companions were completely overpowered, though they struggled and fought to the last with desperate courage.

Just as the train rattled into Rahway the young thieves gave their victims a round of parting kicks, and dashed to the door.

The conductor could scarcely murmur to his companions:

"The whistle is in my vest pocket. Sound the alarm."

Charley crawled to the beaten man, took the whistle from his pocket, and blew it as loud and as long as he could.

When the brakeman rushed into the baggage car, the conductor was insensible.

CHAPTER V.

LIGHT IN THE BAGGAGE CAR—THE CRIPPLE IN A BAD FIX—JUDGE LYNCH HOLDING COURT—OLD BIPUS' PRAYER IS HEARD—WHEN THE BRAKEMEN RUSHED INTO THE BAGGAGE CAR.

WHEN the brakemen rushed into the baggage-car, and saw the conductor lying senseless and bleeding on the floor, and the two cripple tramps beside him, they imagined that he had been murdered; and they concluded at once that Cripple Charley and old Bipus were the murderers.

"Ye murderin' villains," yelled one of the men, a stalwart son of the Emerald Isle; "what are ye after doing at all—at all?"

"Kill them!"

"Lynch them!"

Such were the cries that fell on the brave lad and his half-stunned companions, as the crazy men lifted the conductor from the floor.

"Hold on there, fellers," cried Charley, as he held up his hands in an appealing manner. "Ye're just got hold of the wrong party. The suckers what just laid us out has skeddaddled from the car. We was trying to help the boss here, when they knocked the wind out of us."

"That's played out," cried one of the brakemen. "Grab the rascals, Mike, while we take Harry out to the depot and get him a doctor. I'm afraid he's caved in. Secure the darned tramps."

The securing of the tramps was an easy matter, as Charley did not offer the slightest resistance; while poor Bipus had not yet recovered from the kicks administered by the thieves.

"I tell you what it is, fellers," cried Charley, as they dragged him roughly out of the car, "ye'll be sorry for not believing this child. I'm a reg'lar little hatchet, I am. I never told a whopper in my life. That I might lose my other leg this minit, if the gang what laid the boss out isn't around these here diggins somewhere. They jumped the car as soon as we was near stoppin'."

"That's good enough, young feller," returned one of the brakemen, "but the story won't work. If Harry, there, is dead, your yarn won't save your neck from a Jersey rope."

Old Bipus had so far recovered by this time as to comprehend the position in which they were placed.

"You confounded fools," he cried, "the boy is telling yer the gospel truth. How do yer suppose that a feller like me, without arms, and a young feller like that could tackle a big man like the boss, there? I tell you there was a whole gang of them on him. And we tried our level best to save him. But we didn't have a living show when they blew out the light. We ain't no murderers if we are poor tramps."

"Ye can't come Paddy over us with such a story," cried the Irish brakeman. "But, begorra, I don't see how in the world a fellow like ye, without any fists, could take such a rise out of Harry."

They had reached the depot building by this time, and the alarm spreading, a crowd gathered around.

And still the conductor lay insensible, though every effort was made to restore him to consciousness.

"Harry Lane, the conductor, murdered by tramps," was heard on all sides, as the people forced their way into the room to get a glimpse of the insensible man and his supposed murderers.

"Charley," muttered old Bipus, "we're in a bad fix. If that ere boss don't get over it, and tell the truth about the row, they'll string us up, sure."

"Nary a string up, Bipus," returned the boy cripple. "There's not a jury, even in Jersey, that would string us up, if they give us a show."

I don't scare worth a cent, old fellow. And the boss hasn't handed in his checks, neither. He'll be all right afore long; and then he'll get us out of this scrape."

And still the cry went forth that Harry Lane, one of the most popular conductors on the road, had been murdered by tramps, and that the tramps had been secured.

And still the people were growing more and more excited, and threats of lynching were heard on all sides—spoken in whispers at first, but growing louder and louder as the outrage was discussed and commented on by the excited railroad men and their friends.

The people of Jersey are proverbial for their love of justice; but there are times when the most law-abiding folks will get excited, and take a summary way of disposing of the evil-doer.

Old Bipus heard the murmurs and threats that arose around him, and he knew what they meant.

The old tramp had heard the same cries away off in Kansas and Nevada; and he had witnessed the lynching of more than one horse-thief.

The old soldier was as brave a man as ever charged up a hill against a battery; but he trembled now at the danger that threatened them.

Yet he did not tremble for himself alone.

During their short acquaintance, the crippled boy at his side had become very dear to him.

There was something so winning and lovable in the boy's manner, that the old soldier looked upon him as he would upon a son.

And now the brave, unselfish lad was in danger of losing his life, simply because he had stood by the conductor while defending his life against the young thieves who had escaped.

Old Bipus knew that it would be useless to attempt a defense of himself and his companion.

They were unknown, friendless tramps, caught in the baggage car beside the senseless conductor; and of course, they had assaulted him when he attempted to collect the fare or eject them from the train.

Louder and louder grew the threats; and still the injured man lay insensible.

Old Bipus had not uttered a prayer for many years; but he prayed now—prayed that God would bring the wounded man to his senses, that he could testify as to their innocence.

"String the varmints up!" at length shouted a loud voice.

"Ay—ay! String them up!" cried another voice. "Hanging's too good for them."

"Gentlemen, for God's sake, hold up," pleaded old Bipus, in an appealing voice, while the tears started to his eyes.

"He's going to confess," cried one of the brakemen. "Let's hear what the old rip has to say. Give him time to pray."

"Gentlemen," continued Bipus, as he cast a look of love and pity on Charley, "I'm an old soldier, and I lost my arms fighting again the Indians. I was all through the war, and you'll find my discharge and land papers here under my shirt."

"Let's see them," cried one of the brakemen, as he thrust his hand beneath the old man's woolen garment. "There ain't no papers here. There ain't nothing here."

"H—I's furies, Charley!" yelled the old man, as he danced with rage. "Them young thieves went through me—took me papers, money, and all."

"Played out," cried the brakeman. "You're an old fraud, you are. The police will be here soon, and we must go on with the train. Let's string them up, fellers."

"Yes—yes," was the cry. "Up with them. Don't give them a show to escape."

"Gentlemen," again sang out old Bipus, in frantic tones, "for God's sake, hold your hands for a while; I implore you don't commit a double murder. We are innocent. Wait till the injured man comes to, and he'll tell you."

"Cart him off at once," cried a loud voice.

"Shut up, you wicked old cripple, and try to pray," rang out another.

Once more the old man's voice was heard above the din:

"For Heaven's sake, if ye be men, listen to me. Do with me what ye like—it doesn't matter much, but don't hurt this poor boy here. I tell ye he's as innocent as the child unborn."

Cripple Charley had up to this time stood silent, and apparently unmoved beside his companion.

The boy's face wore a fearless expression, as he looked around at the threatening crowd.

He was, apparently, more interested than

frightened at the novel position in which he found himself.

When old Bipus appealed for him, he turned his face up to that of the armless man, and clapping him on his shoulder, exclaimed:

"We'll hang together, old man. You're as clear of the job as I am. Let them fire away, if they want to. We can't help ourselves. But I will say, though they jerked me up for it, that I put them down for a cowardly set of country-men."

"Clap the rope around their necks."

"Drag them out to the next tree."

"String them up at once before the police come to take them in."

Such were the cries that now arose, as a dozen strong hands were laid on the cripples, while a rope was placed around the neck of each.

At this moment, the doctor, who had arrived a few moments before, and who had been attending the wounded man, sprang forward, exclaiming:

"What are you doing, you crazy fools? Harry here is not dead. He'll be all right in a minute. Don't commit such an outrage. Hand those fellows over to the police. See, Harry is recovering now."

"Thank the Lord!" exclaimed the old soldier, as he looked down at his companion.

"Hold on, old man," returned Charley. "We're not out of the woods yet."

All eyes were now turned on the conductor, though threats were still heard, as some declared that they ought to be hung anyhow.

The human bloodhound is the most terrible animal after all. Let him once scent blood, and he's never satisfied till his thirst is appeased on it.

The conductor opened his eyes and stared wildly about him for some moments.

"All right now, Harry?" queried the doctor, as he applied some water to the man's lips.

"Yes—yes," said the man, as he continued to stare around. "What's up. Run off the track? Struck the down train? What's the row? Much harm done? Many killed?"

"No-no, Harry," replied the doctor. "There's not been an accident at all. You were set on in the baggage-car by the tramps, and they knocked you senseless. You'll soon be all right, old fellow. We've got the rascals."

"I remember now," cried the conductor. "The young villains blew out the lamp, and tackled us in the dark; and we hadn't a living show. Where are the darned rascals?"

"Here they are," cried one of the brakemen, as, with the ropes still around their necks, they led Charley and old Bipus to where the man was lying on the seat.

The conductor looked at them for a moment, and a kindly smile swept over his face, as he reached forth his hand to each, forgetting that the maimed man could not embrace.

"Why, ye darned galoots!" he exclaimed, as he pressed Charley's hand. "They are the fellows that stood by me. Thunder and lightning! did you let that murdering gang escape?"

"We're out of the woods, now, Bipus," cried Charley, as he danced with joy.

"Thank God for it," rejoined the old man.

CHAPTER VI.

AFTER THE YOUNG THIEVES—A RAMBLE THROUGH PHILADELPHIA—AT THE CENTENNIAL GROUNDS—THE CRIPPLES CHARGE THE ENEMY—TIME AND THE RAILROAD TRAIN WAIT FOR NO MAN.

ON and on dashed the the iron horse, with its string of cars, leaving its late conductor stretched on a bed in the hotel; while the two tramps, who had so narrowly escaped hanging, were cared for by those who had threatened them with summary execution.

And now the cry went out for vengeance against the young thieves who had assailed the conductor.

Armed men were sent out in all directions, the telegraph was set to work, and the town was searched high and low.

Yet no trace of the fugitives could be found; the wires failed to announce their capture in any of the neighboring towns or villages.

What cunning rogues those young New York thieves were—cunning, and bold almost to rashness.

While the armed men were riding here and there, alarming the villagers and farmers, while the wires were flashing the warnings to the towns and cities around, and while the attaches of the train were vowing vengeance against them, the same gang of young thieves were resting quietly in the very baggage car in which they had com-

mitted the outrage on the conductor and the cripples.

While the brakemen and passengers were in a ferment of excitement against the two cripples, these daring roughts crawled unperceived into the car—and there they lay in safety.

It was a bold move on their part, and it succeeded.

No one dreamt that they would dare seek refuge in that car again; and, therefore, no one thought of looking for them in a place where they had committed robbery, and almost murder.

Harry Lane, the conductor, had a splendid constitution, and the beating he received did not affect him a great deal.

In the morning he was about again, looking a good deal disfigured, but very little injured; and oh, so anxious was he to set out in quest of the young thieves.

The conductor had a long talk with old Bipus and Charley, and it was agreed between them that they would set out in quest of the gang.

"I know them like a book," said the boy. "And I tell you what it is, boss, they're bound for the Centennial, and they'll fetch up there, too. That's the spot to lay for them, as sure as a gun."

"To the Centennial we'll go, then," returned the conductor. "Hang me if I'll ever run a train again till I've got that gang safely cooped in a Jersey prison. I'll see to it that you fellows are fixed."

The conductor was as good as his word.

Charley and old Bipus were supplied with money, and with free passes in their pockets they took the train for Philadelphia, accompanied by the conductor.

Old Bipus was anxious to recover his money and his claim papers; and he was more than anxious to run across the young thieves.

Charley swore that all he cared for in the world was a chance to "put a head on Possum Pete and Mouser," while the conductor swore over again that "he'd never run another train till he wiped out the disgrace of being laid out by a gang of New York thieves."

Harry Lane and his companions stopped for a few hours at Trenton, in order to procure from the governor of the state the necessary papers for arresting the young robbers; and then, accompanied by a detective, the whole party set out for the Centennial City.

The day was far advanced when the party arrived at Philadelphia.

Charley and old Bipus sought quiet and humble lodgings, while the conductor and detective put up at a hotel near the Centennial grounds.

But the two cripples had no idea of resting for the evening.

"Charley," said the old man, after they had rested awhile after their supper, "I think we'd better be out on the move. We might strike across that infernal gang; and I want to look around to see if I can't find some trace of my little girl."

"How'll you know her, Bipus?" inquired the boy.

"I won't know her at all," returned the old soldier, as his brows darkened. "But I'll know that false woman, and there's no doubt that they're together, if they're living. I know the man, and, by the great God above us, he'll know me one of these days!"

So they tramped through Chestnut and Walnut streets, and out of Second as far as Willow, the old soldier looking carefully at every face in the hopes of meeting his lost wife, while Charley had his eyes open in order to get some trace of the young thieves, if possible.

Of course the two cripples attracted much attention as they strolled along the quiet streets of the Quaker City.

But they took little heed of the remarks that fell on their ears, save now and then that Charley would turn on some of the boys and banter them to fight, a challenge which none cared to accept.

"No luck to-night, Charley," remarked old Bipus, as they strolled back to their lodgings in Callowhill street. "We'll have to go out to the Centennial grounds in the morning. We might strike the wretches there."

"And your daughter, Bipus?" inquired Charley.

"I'll run across her, too, afore long. I feel it in my bones that I will."

So, bright and early they were out at the Centennial grounds, on the watch for the gang.

Harry Lane and the Jersey detective were on hand also; and though they did not approach the cripples, they kept them in view, ready to fly to their assistance if they fell foul of Mouser and his gang.

The cripples did not attempt to enter the Ex-

hibition grounds, as they reasoned that the young thieves would confine their operation to the entrance.

"'Tis a big thing, Charley," remarked old Bipus, as he looked at the crowds that were hurrying into the grounds.

"Hurrah!" cried Charley, as he sprang forward, his eyes flashing with excitement. "There's the whole gang of them, Bipus. Let's down on them at once, ere they give us the slip."

There they were, sure enough, as unconscious of danger as if they had been squatted on the dock at Burling Slip in their own city.

"See, the villains are making believe to be boot-blacks," remarked old Bipus. "Hold on there, Charley, till you give the signal to the conductor and that detective fellow."

Charley looked over to the hotel where he had last seen his friends; but he looked in vain; they were not to be seen.

"We must down on them ourselves, Bipus!" cried the impulsive boy, burning to avenge the treatment he had received on the train. "They might get away."

"Go it, then, old fellow," returned his companion, as he ran along with Charley to the entrance. "We can lay them out before t'other chaps will be with us."

The visitors stared at the two cripples as they dashed up to where the young thieves were standing.

But they stared still more when they saw them rush in among the pretended boot-blacks, and commence to knock them about right and left.

The thieves were taken completely by surprise at this unlooked-for assault.

They had no idea that the cripples would turn up so soon after the terrible beating they had received on the baggage car.

"Ha—ha, you young skunks!" yelled old Bipus, as with head thrust out like a battering ram, he flung himself in their midst, bearing Skinny Myers to the ground, as he struck him in the breast.

Then the old soldier wheeled around, and lifting his foot, he kicked Possum Pete under the chin, lifting him clean off the ground, and sending him sprawling on the sidewalk.

Charley sprang on Mouser, grabbed him by the throat, and commenced to hammer him in the face with all his might, exclaiming:

"You dirty thief, I'll make yer yell for the laying out ye give us. Go in, Bipus; give them rats. Whale the life out of them."

And old Bipus did go in—now with his head, and then with his feet—till he had knocked down four of the gang, and he was still hammering away at the rest.

In the meantime, Charley had his hands full with Mouser, as that young rough, the first surprise over, fought like a demon to break away from his assailant.

Old Bipus was in the act of kicking one of the young thieves, when a policeman laid his hand on his shoulder, and cried out:

"What's all this row about? Hold on there, you cripple, or I'll club you."

Old Bipus was so excited that he paid no attention to the order, and letting fly his foot once more, he struck the officer in the stomach, and sent him to the ground.

"Take them all in! Break up the crowd! Club them if they resist!" cried a captain of police, as he dashed in among the combatants, followed by a squad of his men.

In less than a minute the fight was stopped, and all the combatants were made prisoners.

As they were marched along to the station-house, old Bipus turned to the captain, and cried out:

"Them there young skunks robbed a conductor on the train from New York, the other night, and they came near killing him, too. That's what we tackled them for. The conductor and a Jersey detective are over there at the hotel."

"You're an old lying fraud," yelled Mouser, as he glared savagely at his accuser. "Don't believe a word he says, boss."

"Shut up, or I'll club you," cried the officer. "I'll send you all down as vagrants and disturbers of the peace."

Old Bipus and Charley looked eagerly around for their friends, but there was not a trace of them in sight.

"Confound those Jersey men," said the old man to Charley. "If they don't show up, we're in a bad box. I don't want to be sent to Moyamensing prison, if I can help myself. 'Twill never do, Charley."

"We'll have to grin and bear it, old boss. We got half square with that gang, and we'll give them another dose afore long."

"I'll kill yer yet, ye cripple sucker," muttered Mouser, as he glared at Charley.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE POLICE COURT—OLD BIPUS HOLDS FORTH—THE THIEVES' DESPERATION—A RUSH FOR LIBERTY—THE CRIPPLES LAY THEIR PLANS.

"CONFOUND the luck, Charley," whispered old Bipus, as they were dragged into the police court. "We're no sooner out of one scrape than we're into another. At this rate, we'll never get out to our farm."

"Hoop-la!" returned the merry lad. "There's no use hollerin' about it. We'll have to grin an' bear it. What in the thunder could have become of those Jersey chaps to leave us in the lurch?"

"We've got the gang, anyhow," continued old Bipus. "Ye just let me spin my yarn, an' see if we don't get them well sweetened."

"Silence there!" roared an officer. "If ye cripples don't shut up yer jaw, we'll put a muzzle on yer, as we do the dogs."

"Muzzle yerself, ye old galoot," muttered Charley, as he winked at old Bipus. "He's a regular old kiuddle, he is."

The police had succeeded in arresting every member of the thieving gang from New York; and, as there was a justice sitting at all times, for the purpose of disposing of the suspicious characters that flocked to the Centennial grounds, their examination was proceeded with at once.

The charge against all the prisoners was riotous and disorderly conduct.

"I think, sir," said the captain who had charge of the police, "in fact, I am positive, that this is one of those crowds of young thieves who come on here from New York, making believe to be bootblacks, and taking every opportunity to rob the visitors."

"That's so, boss," cried out Charley.

"Ye lie! ye little snoozer," yelled Possum Pete, as he flashed daggers at Charley. "We are on the square, we are, judge. We came in here to rake up a dime shinin' up, 'cause business is played out in New York; an' them there snoozers set on us. That's the square talk of it, judge, sure's yer born."

"Ye looks like square mechanics, don't ye?" cried Charley. "Why, choke me, if ye war to put yerselves up for that around the Hall in York, the fellers would run yer down to the Battery and chuck yer overboard. Say, boss, they're frauds and bloaks, they are."

The justice and officers were somewhat amused at this wordy war, and the former had discrimination enough to see that Charley was telling the truth.

Old Bipus had not opened his lips as yet, in order to address the justice, but Charley knew that he was preparing his speech, and that he would soon "spread himself" in the most approved style.

The old soldier had been anxiously on the lookout for the conductor and the detective, feeling assured that if they once made their appearance all would be well.

As the moments flew by without their friends presenting themselves, and as old Bipus feared that Charley and himself would be sent to prison with the young thieves, he resolved to plead his own case.

And he did plead his case in a masterly manner.

He told the justice in clear, concise words, of their adventures since they left New York—of their fights on the train, and of their mission to the Centennial in quest of the would-be murderers.

The old man was listened to with attention and respect, for there was something in his voice and manner, despite his somewhat forlorn appearance, that commanded attention.

Oh, how Mouser, Possum Pete, and their companions frowned and muttered curses as the old man told the story of their ruffianism.

Visions of Moyamensing Prison and Jersey justice floated before their eyes, and rendered them desperate.

It was pleasant to see Charley's animated face and flashing eyes, as he heard the eloquent old man tell his straightforward story; and you should have heard the hearty expressions of approval that fell from the boy's mouth when his companion told of the scenes through which they had passed.

"If you go through the young scamps now," cried the old soldier, when he had concluded his story, "you may brand me as a fraud if you don't find my papers and money on them."

At this declaration, Possum Pete turned dead-pale.

The young villain had the money and papers in his pocket; and he knew that if they were discovered on him, it would be all up with him.

The justice noticed the agitation of the young thief, and he ordered an officer to examine all the prisoners.

"That's the ticket!" cried the exultant old soldier, as he saw Possum Pete shrink back at the approach of the officer. "Search that rascal first. I'll bet the drinks he's got them."

Possum Pete glared at the old man for a moment, as he shouted:

"Ye're a lyin' old fraud, an' I'll lay yer out yet for this!"

As the young thief spoke, he sprang across the room to where old Bipus was standing, aimed a blow at his head.

Charley saw the movement, and rushed to the assistance of his friend; but he was not quick enough to ward off the blow.

Possum Pete was in a desperate mood; and he was as vengeful as he was daring.

Before the old soldier could defend himself in any way, the young thief struck him a violent blow on the side of the head, which sent him staggering against the rail.

"Take that, yer old snoozer," cried the desperate young rowdy, as he rushed to the door. "Cut for it, fellers, cut for it!"

In a moment all was confusion and excitement.

The justice called on the officers to secure their prisoners; while the young thieves, following the example of their desperate leader, rushed for the door.

The officers sprang on their prisoners, and endeavored to secure them; but the nimble young rascals, evading their efforts, dashed out through the door, and away down the street, followed by the police.

The justice was so much excited that he left his bench and joined in the pursuit.

Charley had endeavored to strike down Possum Pete as he was making for the door; but the rush of the desperate gang flung him to the floor; and when he arose there was no one in the court-room save old Bipus and himself.

"Let's skedaddle," cried Charley, as he looked around and saw that there was no one to detain him. "They'll lug us in if we hang around here. The coast is clear; let's put for it, old man."

"That's the cheese, Charley," replied old Bipus. "But, see here, youngster, I want to get my stamps and papers out of them young thieves."

"They'll slap us in, if we hang around here," said Charley. "If they haul in the snoozers again, we'll find them Jersey fellers, and they'll look to us. We can't do no good here now. Let's get."

And get they did, as fast as their understandings could carry them.

Taking refuge in a lager beer saloon, they looked out of the window and watched the return of the officers who had set out in search of the fugitives.

Ten minutes elapsed, and they saw the officers marching back to the court-room with some of the gang in their charge.

Possum Pete, Mouser, Skinny Myers, and another of the rascals managed to escape.

"We must lay low here for awhile," said the old soldier, as he watched the officers and their prisoners. "If we show up now, they'll jug us for witnesses. They ain't caught half of them yet. And we must catch the fellers what's got my stamps and papers. And there's those Jersey galoots now."

As the old man spoke he pointed to Harry Lane and the detective.

These active detectives had been indulging in an interesting game of billiards; and it was only a few moments before that they had heard of the arrest of the gang they were looking for.

Now they were hastening to the court, in order to secure the remaining prisoners.

"See here, Charley," said old Bipus, as his companion helped him to a sandwich and a glass of lager, "if we show up now, they'll lug us back to Jersey as witnesses against them young thieves. And they ain't got the worst of them. We'll make ourselves scarce for a while, and lay for Possum Pete and the others. Them Jersey-men left us in the lurch—and now they can fire ahead on their own hook."

"That's so, old man," returned Cripple Charley. "I don't want to be lugged back to Jersey, if we can get square on Possum Pete some other way."

"Them fellows can't hang about these diggin's any more," continued old Bipus. "And they can't face back to York, for the Jersey-men will be laying for them. You just see if they don't

make a break for out West. That's our lay, if we want to get hold of the stamps and them papers of mine."

"I believe you, old man," returned Charley. "Let the Jersey-men go hang themselves. We'll lay off here; and when it gets dark we'll start on the tramp again. I know we'll strike Possum Pete and his gang afore long. Oh, wouldn't I like to get one good square chance at laying them out. 'Twould do me as much good as a big feed of Little Neck clams."

So it was arranged between old Bipus and Charley that they would "take their ease" in that lager beer saloon, and let the Jersey-men look to the prosecution of the young thieves the policeman had secured.

The cripples had read of the horrors of a House of Detention, and they had no ambition to make martyrs of themselves, especially as the great scoundrels of the gang had not been secured.

They were not without means, as the Jersey folks had supplied them with a fair share of stamps.

"Possum Pete and them other fellers will strike for the country, Charley," said the old man. "We'll do the same thing. You bet I get my stamps and papers out of them yet."

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE BANKS OF THE SCHUYLKILL—A FARMER WHO FEARED TRAMPS—THE CRIPPLES GET A FREE RIDE—THE HIGHWAY ROBBERS AND HOW THEY WERE RECEIVED.

THE cripples passed the day as quietly as possible, in the back room of the lager beer saloon.

As they paid for all they called for, the honest Dutchman did not trouble himself much about them, while his children were much amused in watching Charley, as he administered to the wants of his somewhat helpless companion.

Evening came, and then they left the saloon, making for the road that leads to Manayunk.

Out on the tramp once more, our adventurers felt as happy as possible.

On and on they went, chatting as merrily as if they had fortunes awaiting them on the morrow; and laughing gaily the while as they thought of the adventures of the last two days.

"They got the best of us, Charley," said old Bipus, alluding to the fights with the thieves. "There's no rubbing that out; but we'll get hunky with them yet, old fellow. I feel it in my bones. We'll strike on them when they ain't looking for us."

"Confound the dead beats!" cried Cripple Charley, as he thought of the way in which the gang had triumphed over them. "I'm almost sorry we didn't lay for them about New York. If we make back there we'll run foul of them sure."

"Nary a time, Charley; you just hold up now awhile, and you can put me down for a fraud if we don't run foul of those fellows before we tramp much longer."

At this time the tramps were traveling along the old road on the banks of the Schuylkill river.

On this quiet summer evening no sound broke on their ears save the rippling of the river and the chirping of the birds who were settling to rest.

It was a fit spot for deeds of murder and violence; and so thought the tramps, as they walked along in the gathering twilight.

Just such thoughts flashed through a farmer's mind as he drove homeward along the silent road.

This farmer, that day, had been reading of the terrible outrages committed by tramps throughout the country—he had been reading of burglaries, arsons, outrages, highway robberies and murders, until his mind was completely full of the subject.

As he passed each bush and clump of trees he expected to see a gang of marauders pounce out at him, calling on him to "stand, and deliver" in the most approved Dick Turpin style.

This Pennsylvania farmer was not a coward by any means, and was not afraid of shadows, but he had become so nervous from reading of tramps and their crimes that he was worked up to a state of excitement almost bordering on frenzy.

It must also be remembered that he had about his person over \$300 in greenbacks, the proceeds of sales and collections.

This money was needed to pay a note falling due on the morrow, and the honest farmer looked upon himself as a ruined man should he fail to meet his obligations.

A turn in the road is passed, and through the darkening twilight he perceived two strange figures ahead of him.

"Tramps!" he exclaimed, as he drew in the homeward-bound steeds, and tightened his grasp on the heavy whip.

Feeling somewhat ashamed of his involuntary cowardice, the farmer plies the whip to the horses, as he urges them on with loud shouts.

"What a blamed fool I am," he exclaimed, "to be skeered by two such or'nary looking rowdies as them."

He had noticed the crippled condition of the tramps, and he felt assured that two such forlorn beings could do him no injury, even though ever so much inclined to try it on.

This farmer had a kind heart, and as he looked on old Bipus and Charley, his suspicious feelings gave way to nobler emotions; in fact, all fears and doubts vanished, and he felt that the beings before him were more objects of pity than distrust.

As the wagon passed the cripples, the farmer looked closely at them as he muttered:

"Poor critters, where in the world can they be going to? Them's the queerest tramps I ever saw."

The farmer drove on a little further, and suddenly pulling up his horses, he waited until the tramps drew near.

"Say, strangers," he cried out, as he bent over the side of the wagon, "where in thunder be you going to?"

"We are on the tramp, boss," replied Charley. "Ain't you going to give us a free ride?"

The man looked once more at the upturned face of the merry boy, and casting a glance on his companion, he replied:

"I don't care if I do; I hate to see fellows like you trudging along in that way. But where are you bound for, anyway?"

"See here, stranger," cried out old Bipus, as he advanced to the side of the wagon, "we're tramps, we are, but we ain't dead beats; we ain't over flush of stamps, but if you give us a lift in that ere wagon of yours, we're willing to come down for it, providing you don't pile on first-class rates."

"Oh, you get out," cried the farmer, as he smiled on the wayfarer. "I don't drive no stage-coach. Git in there behind, and I'll take you a spell beyond Manayunk Bridge, if you be going that way."

"Boss," cried Charley, "you're a brick, you are. It's all the same to us which way we travel. I'll remember you in my will; you may bet your boots on that."

The farmer laughed again at Charley's promise of future recompense; then he cried:

"Hurry up your cakes if you want to take a ride; it's getting late, and I want to strike home before midnight."

So the two tramps managed to crawl into the rear of the wagon, the farmer whipped his horses, and away rattled the wagon.

"We're in luck, old fellow," said Charley to his companion, as he stretched himself on the clean straw. "Who knows but the old chap will offer us a supper and a bed before he parts with us? Tramping isn't so bad, after all."

"There's no such luck, Charley," returned the old soldier, "though the fellow seems a good kind of a critter. I'll bet you if we offered to go near his house, he'd set the dog on us."

"If Sal saw me carting these tramps along," muttered the farmer, "she'd swear I was a 'farnal fool.'"

Then it flashed through the honest man's mind that his passengers might be members of a numerous gang who were hanging around the neighborhood, ready to pounce on any victim passing that way.

This suspicion had no sooner taken possession of his mind when a loud shout fell on his ear, and out from the woods rushed four figures.

Ere the man had time to urge his horses to speed, one of the figures sprang at the animals' head, while the other three crowded around the driver's seat, muttering curses and threats.

The farmer was taken by surprise by the sudden onslaught, and his first impulse was to lash the horses, and force his way from the threatened danger.

The spirited animals plunged and reared, and bounding forward, dragged their assailant with them for some distance.

The robbers ran alongside the wagon, and with their clubs endeavored to strike the farmer from his seat, while at the same time they shouted:

"Hold on there, you old fool, or we'll knock the head off you!"

The startled horses were still struggling with the outlaw who held their heads, and the farmer, dropping the reins and grasping his whip, turned on his assailants and endeavored to beat them off.

Up the side of the wagon the robbers sprang, striking furiously at the farmer, all the while shouting cries of vengeance.

In the meantime Charley and old Bipus heard the uproar outside, and for a moment they were puzzled what to make of it.

But they were not long in ignorance of what was passing.

Charley's quick ear detected the voice of Possum Pete, as that young desperado shouted to the farmer.

"Surrender, you galoot, or I will mash yer head into a jelly."

"Say, Bipus," said Charley, in a low voice, as he got up in the wagon, "here's another racket. We'll have to sail in and give the farmer a hand. That's Possum Pete and his gang, sure's your born. Lively, old man, till we charge on 'em."

"I told yer, Charley," returned the cripple, "we'd strike 'em afore long. Now, see how we'll lay them out. Let's crawl out of the back of the cart, and pounce down on the suckers."

The next moment the two cripples were out of the wagon, and bearing down on their old foes.

The farmer was fighting furiously with his assailants, striking them right and left as they attempted to force their way up to his seat.

Possum Pete and Mouser were on one side of the wagon, and Skinny Myers was on the other, while the fourth thief was still holding the heads of the struggling horses.

The farmer shouted, the thieves uttered curses and threats as the blows of the whip fell on them.

"Grab the sucker's feet and drag him off," yelled Possum Pete, as he rushed to the attack once more, after having been sent reeling to the side of the road by a blow from the farmer's whip.

At this moment the man received a severe blow on the side of the head from the heavy stick in the hands of Skinny Myers, and it sent him over the seat on the struggling horses.

Possum Pete and Mouser grabbed him by the legs and dragged him to the ground.

Then, with loud yells and curses, they set on the farmer, who was still struggling desperately.

"Fork out yer money!" cried Possum Pete, as they crowded around their victim. "Shell out at once, or we'll kill yer. Halloo! What in— is this?"

"Pile in, Charley!" yelled old Bipus, as, with head down, he dashed into the midst of the young robbers.

Bang went the old soldier's head against Possum Pete's breast; and that young scamp was sent sprawling to the side of the road.

Then the old soldier let fly his right foot, and Mouser caught it in the face.

Charley sprang on Skinny Myers, and, grabbing him by the hair, he commenced to pound away at his face.

The farmer did not know what to make of this sudden turn in affairs.

When he was first attacked, it flashed through his mind that the cripples in the wagon were members of the gang assailing him.

When he was dragged from his seat, and as he lay on the road at the mercy of the robbers, he saw the cripples rushing towards them; and then he felt certain that they were hastening to assist the others.

But when he beheld Charley and old Bipus fighting his assailants, and knocking them around like tenpins, he uttered a shout of joy, grasped his whip, sprang to his feet, and rushed at the robber who held his horses.

Oh, but 'twas fun to see old Bipus jump around the road after Possum Pete and Mouser, and kicking away at one and then the other.

Charley had his hands full with Skinny Myers, for that young tramp, the first surprise over, fought like a tiger.

In fact, all the gang, when they recognized Charley and old Bipus, renewed the fight with furious determination.

"Pile into the old cripple," yelled Possum Pete, as he grasped his club and made for old Bipus. "Ye darned old fool, we'll lay yer out now sure. Go in, Mouser. Sock it to the little snoozer, Skinny. Go it, ye cripples."

The farmer thought he could make short work of his assailants, now that he had received aid from those he had befriended.

But the man was mistaken.

The young tramp who had seized his horses was a tough customer, full of pluck and fight; and as he turned towards him, he let go his graps on the horses' heads, grabbed his stick, and faced his opponent.

The farmer struck at him with his heavy whip; but the active thief sprang aside to avoid the blow, and then he let fly at his opponent and dealt him a severe blow on the side of the head.

A loud curse from the farmer, a yell of delight from the young robber, and the whip and club are at work again.

Possum Pete is jumping around the road after old Bipus, and striving to get in a blow with his stick on the old man's head; while Mouser, thinking that Possum was enough for the old cripple, has assailed the farmer in the rear.

Charley and Skinny Myers are pommeling away at each other, now fighting face to face, and now rolling on the ground.

It was a rousing fight all around, with the odds against the farmer and the cripples.

Oh, if that old soldier had but the use of one arm, he would soon make short work of Possum Pete.

As it was, he was doing splendid work.

Springing about the road, and grinning and yelling at his opponent, he would let fly his foot at every opportunity, while at the same time he kept shouting words of encouragement to the farmer and Charley.

While thus engaged with Possum Pete, the old veteran saw that the farmer was getting badly beaten by his two assailants.

The old man knew that if the farmer was once overpowered, Charley and he would stand but a poor show against the four desperate thieves.

Uttering a wild cry, he sprang to the farmer's assistance, and fetching Mouser on the back with his head, he sent him on his face to the ground.

"Don't give in, farmer," cried the old veteran, as, following up his advantage, he kicked the fallen thief ere Possum Pete could fly to his assistance.

The farmer, encouraged by this timely assistance, renewed the fight furiously; and the next moment his other assailant was stretched senseless before him.

"Go in, now, for the other skunks," yelled old Bipus, as he danced around once more to avoid the blows that Possum Pete aimed at him.

And the farmer did go in with a vengeance.

Charley was still struggling with Skinny Myers, when old Bipus ran to his side, exclaiming:

"How are you making out, sonny?"

"Bully," cried Charley, as he let fly his stump at his opponent. "There's the finishing touch."

It was the finishing touch, for Skinny Myers lay before him, bleeding and exhausted.

Possum Pete saw that his companions were knocked out of time; and he saw that the farmer and the cripples were about to set on him, so he deemed it best to beat a retreat.

Uttering a wild yell, he dashed into the woods, leaving his companions in the power of the victors.

CHAPTER IX.

THE VICTORS AND THEIR CAPTIVES—HOW THE YOUNG ROBBERS WERE PUNISHED—THE CRIPPLES IN CLOVER—THE WILD CRY IN THE BURNING HOUSE.

"HIP—hip, hurrah!" yelled old Bipus, as he stood on the road and gazed at the fallen robbers. "It takes the cripples to do it. Aha! ye skunks, we got square with ye at last. I'm sorry that other rascal got off so easy."

"He's the worst of the gang," cried Charley. "I'm sorry we didn't lay him out. That's Possum Pete. He's put them other chaps up to this job."

"I'll follow him," said the farmer. "You fellows look after the horses, and don't let them rascals get away."

"Don't do it," interrupted old Bipus. "Let the skunk slide. Some more of the gang may be hanging around here. Let's give these skunks a good dose, and then we'll push along."

"All right," returned the farmer, as he looked at the cripples with a kindly face. "You fellows are trumps, and no mistake. If I hadn't given you a ride them robbers would have got the best of me. I'll stand to you for this."

"Don't mention it," said Charley, laughing, "you'll make us blush. Why, them snoozers are old enemies of ours, and we just wanted the chance to go for them."

"What will we do with them?" inquired the farmer, as he looked at the young robbers who were still lying on the road, bleeding and helpless.

"Let up on us," muttered Mouser. "We've got the worst of it."

"Where's my stamps and papers, ye young villain?" cried old Bipus.

"Possum Pete's got 'em," replied Mouser. "I'll take me oath he has. He carried all our stamps. He's captain of the gang."

"Let's go through 'em," cried Charley. "We'll see what the snoozers have in their pockets."

The three young robbers had by this time somewhat recovered from the blows they had received; but they were too much exhausted to offer any resistance to their captors.

Old Bipus and the farmer stood over them, while Charley searched their clothes.

Mouser had told the truth about the money, as Charley could find only a few stamps in their pockets.

"I'll tell you what I will do, fellows," said old Bipus, as he glared at his late foes.

"What's that?" inquired the farmer.

"These here young skunks ought to be strung up to that tree, for all the rascality they're up to; but we'll let up on them a little. We'll just take off their clothes, lick them like thunder, and let them go on the tramp naked."

"Yes—yes," cried the farmer; "I don't care to lug them to the justice, as I'm too busy to waste time appearing against them. Let's give them a ternal good licking, and then give them a swim in the river."

Charley yelled with delight at this proposition, while the robbers cried out for mercy.

"Get the rope out of the wagon," said the farmer, as he picked up the sticks used by his assailants and flung them into the wagon. "Now we'll give these young rowdies the best licking they ever got."

There wasn't an ounce of fight left in the thieves, or they would have struggled with the farmer and the two cripples.

With a club in one hand and his heavy whip in the other, the farmer stood over the scamps, while Charley proceeded to drag off their clothes.

Old Bipus stood by grinning at the rogues, and taunting them.

"Won't the 'skeeters have a fine meal on you fellers to-night!" he cried. "I guess you'll not go for the cripples again in a hurry. I told yer, Charley, we'd fall foul of this gang 'fore long."

"We'll give 'em Jessica," cried Charley.

"Won't they squall when I lay on that rope?"

As Charley stripped each of the young robbers, the farmer took some strong cords and bound their hands and feet.

Oh, how the defeated thieves begged for mercy, as Charley and the farmer applied the rope's ends to their naked backs.

And then the woods re-echoed with their yells, while old Bipus walked around them whistling the "Rogue's March."

While Charley and the farmer were laying it on to the young robbers, Possum Pete watched the proceedings from a tree in which he had sought refuge.

"I'll make them fellers sweat for that yet," hissed the thief, as he listened to the yells of his suffering friends. "That farmer will suffer for this job, or I'll swallow my shirt."

When the farmer and Charley had lashed their victims till the blood was streaming down their backs, they dragged them to the river's side, one by one, and, taking off the cords, pushed them over into the water.

The thieves were old dock-rats, and they were at home in the water.

Mouser struck out at once for the opposite bank, and his companions followed suit.

"Let them slide now," cried old Bipus, as he watched them swimming across the river. "We'll cart off their old duds, and they'll have a nice time getting any covering. We got the best of them that time, Charley."

"You bet, old man. But I'm sorry we didn't lay out Possum Pete. He's the worst crowd of all. If he ever comes across us again, you bet he'll try some ugly game on us. He won't tackle us open any more."

The farmer insisted that the two tramps should accompany him home, and off they started in the wagon, well pleased at the termination of the fight.

When they arrived at the farm-house, the farmer told his wife and children of the fight, and of the brave way in which the cripples had acted.

Then our tramps were lions indeed.

Nothing in the house was too good for them; and after they had supped and played with the children and related stories, they were shown into a comfortable room to rest for the night.

"You must stay a week with me, at least," said the farmer, as he bade them good-night.

"All right, boss," cried Charley. "We'll stick to yer while ye want us."

The cripples retired to bed at once, as they were very weary after the day.

"This is better than bunking in a baggage-car," said the old soldier, as he flung himself on the bed.

"You bet, old man," returned Charley. "Only I'm sorry we didn't lay hold of Possum Pete, and get the papers and stamps."

"We'll get them yet, Charley," said the old man.

And very soon the cripples were sound asleep. The old man dreamt of his lost wife and child, and of the villain who had stolen them away from him; while Charley dreamt of Possum Pete and of the scenes through which they had recently passed.

Hours passed by and the cripples slept on.

Suddenly a wild cry arose throughout the house, followed by screams of terror from the woman and her children.

The cry awoke Charley and old Bipus, and they started up in the bed.

"What in thunder is up?" cried Charley, as he rubbed his eyes. "Halloo! I'll be hanged if the house isn't on fire."

"Ha—ha—ha!" yelled a voice at the window. "Now, ye blasted cripples, we've got ye in a hole that ye can't get out of."

"Possum Pete," cried Charley, as he sprang out of the bed. "Hurry up, old man, or we'll smother here. That darned snoozer has set fire to the house."

CHAPTER X.

AFTER THE PUNISHMENT—THE FIENDS ON THE TRAIL—THE BLAZING FARM-HOUSE—THE CRIPPLES' DEVOTION AND THEIR DESPERATE STRUGGLE FOR LIFE.

POSSUM PETE, from his position in the tree, saw all that had happened to his companions.

He saw the cripples and the farmer taking off their clothes—and he heard their yells as the rope was applied to their bare backs.

Fierce and deep were the threats of vengeance that fell from the young thief's lips, as he saw his sworn companions, one by one, flung into the Schuylkill river.

Then, as the victors were about to drive away with the clothes, Possum Pete descended from the tree, crawled through the bushes to the side of the road, and noted the name on the farmer's wagon.

"Jacob Harmon," muttered Possum Pete, as he hurried back to the banks of the river, "if I don't make you sweat for that trick, you may call me a heathen Chinee. And won't we get square on them blasted cripples?"

Once on the bank of the river, he saw his beaten friends crouching and shivering under some bushes on the other side.

Possum Pete placed his finger on his mouth and sent forth a peculiar whistle, which was responded to by the naked victims.

"Paddle over here again," yelled the young thief. "Don't be skeared. The coast is clear. Hurry up your cakes if you want to get square with the suckers; we'll have ter be on the fly. Get over here quick, I say."

Into the cool water the shivering thieves sprang once more, while the blood from their cuts and wounds stained the water as they swam.

"Fellers," cried Possum Pete, as his shivering companions stood around him under a tree, "this is rough on us—cussed rough on ye. But don't be down-hearted, for 'tisn't as bad as being jugged."

"Where in the thunder will we get any rags to cover us?" grumbled Mouser.

"I'll fix that," replied Possum Pete. "You just crawl in under them bushes, an' I'll skoot down to that house we passed on the hill. I saw a lot of old duds out on the lines as we cum along. I'll scoop them to yer in a short time. Then we'll make after that skunk of a farmer and them cussed cripples. I say, fellers, we must lay them out afore morning."

"We'll cut them to bits," yelled Mouser.

"I'd give my neck to get square with that snoozer, Cripple Charley. Thunders, didn't he lay on to me. There's not a bone left whole in my body. I'll tear the heart out of the darned cripple when I run foul of him again."

"Swear away, fellers," said Possum Pete, "till I come back with the duds. Curse the snoozers; 'twill keep yer blood a moving."

So saying, the young thief ran off on his errand of pillage.

Half an hour after Possum Pete returned to his shivering companions, bringing with him a lot of old shirts and pants, and also a bottle of whiskey.

"Take a swig of this, fellers," he cried, as he

held the bottle before them. "'Twill give yer a shake up for the work before yer. Then get in to these here duds as quick as lightning, till we make tracks after that wagon. We'll pay Jacob Harmon a visit afore many hours, if we have to crawl on our hands through the woods."

The young thieves drank, and you may rest assured that they took big horns.

It was quite dark when they set out in pursuit of the farmer and the cripples.

Though the young rascals were weary and sore, they trudged along the road at a quick pace, as each of them was anxious, nay, burning for vengeance.

At the tavern beyond Manayunk Bridge, Possum Pete procured some refreshments, and a further supply of whiskey.

His companions did not enter the tavern, as it was not deemed well to excite suspicion, inasmuch as the principal object of the visit was to ascertain where the farmer lived.

Possum Pete assumed the air and manner of one in search of honest employment, and informing the tavernkeeper that he had that day made an engagement with Jacob Harmon, but having failed to meet him at the proper time, he had started out on foot to reach his farm.

The tavern-keeper gave him all the information required, pointing out the road to the farmer's house, and describing the place so accurately as to render it an easy matter for the thieves to proceed on their mission of vengeance.

More whiskey, a little solid food, and the young robbers renewed their journey.

'Tis little the farmer imagined, as he was entertaining his strange guests, and listening to the stories told by old Bipus, that the demons of hate and destruction were lurking about his home.

'Tis little Charley and the old man thought, as they retired to their sleeping room, that the eyes of their vindictive enemies were on them, and that their rest would be broken by cries of terror and the roaring of flames.

When the young fiends saw that the family and guests had retired for the night, they set about the work of destruction.

Possum Pete and Mouser forced their way into the dwelling, and stole silently to the room where the farmer and his wife were sleeping, having first set fire to some combustible material in the kitchen below.

The other rascals entered the outhouses, placed matches in the dry straw and hay, and then retired to assist their companions and watch the fiendish work.

Possum Pete and Mouser made short work of securing whatever valuables they could lay their hands on, including the money that was to be used by the farmer on the morrow; and they were about retiring from the room, when the woman of the house awoke.

At this moment the smoke and flames burst up stairs and into the bed-room.

"My God!" yelled the woman, as she saw the thieves retreating from the room. "We are murdered—robbed! Jacob—Jacob! the house is on fire! Wake up—wake up!"

The woman sprang out of bed as she spoke, and shook her husband.

The farmer was thoroughly confused for a time, and sat up in bed, looking about him like dazed.

"The children—the children!" cried the woman, as she drew a loose wrapper over her night dress. "Oh, Jacob—Jacob! save the children!"

The drowsy farmer became conscious at length of the great danger that threatened his family and himself.

Hastily drawing on his pants, he ran to an inner room, seized two children that were lying in a bed, and rushed down the stairs through the smoke, followed by his wife.

As the farmer reached the yard he heard a mocking cry at the window above him; and, on looking up, he beheld Possum Pete gazing in at old Bipus and Charley.

He was about to rush into the burning house again, in order to save two other children who were sleeping on the same floor with the cripples, when a furious yell burst on his ears, and the young demons set on him, crying out:

"Kill the son of a gun!"

"Knock the head off him!"

"Rip it into him!"

The farmer's wife screamed with terror, as she saw the young robbers pounce upon her husband.

"Oh, God, they'll murder my husband. My children are in the house. They'll be burned to death. Help! murder! help!"

At this moment old Bipus and Charley, their eyes staring with astonishment, appeared at the window above.

They saw the farmer struggling with the rob-

bers; they heard the woman's cry of anguish, and they knew that two of the children were still in the burning house.

"Let's go for the young uns!" cried Charley, as he made a dash for the door of the bedroom.

"Thunder and lightening, yes!" responded the old soldier; "we must save the little ones."

Out in the entry the cripples rushed, where the fire and smoke met them with fury.

They could hear the cries of the terrified children in the room beyond; loud rang the screams of the mother, while, mingling with the roar of the flames and the farmer's cries of rage and defiance, came the yells and threats of the dastardly young robbers.

"This is rough, old man," said Cripple Charley, as he struggled through the smoke.

"Push on, sonny," responded old Bipus. "We must save the young ones. Push into the room there, clap one of them around my neck, grab the other yourself, and get out as fast as possible, or we're gone sinners. The flames are gathering around us. Keep your mouth shut to keep out the smoke."

Forcing in the bed-room door, from whence proceeded the voices of the screaming children, the devoted cripples dashed into the apartment.

The next moment Charley had seized the younger child in his arms and dashed from the room, followed by old Bipus, the other child clinging about his neck.

"Try the stairs, Charley," cried the old man, as he ran towards the room where they had been sleeping, "I'll spring from the window."

And still the flames shot up through the doomed house, the farmer struggling manfully with the four robbers; and the anxious mother screamed for aid, while at her side stood two of her children crying with fright, as, in the glare of the fierce flames, they saw their brave father strike right and left at his assailants.

"Stand from under!" cried old Bipus, as, with the child clinging about his neck, he sprang from the window.

At the same moment, Charley, holding the other child in his arms, sprang out of the front door.

Another yell burst from the young robbers as they saw their old antagonists in the yard before them.

"Save my husband! Murder—murder!" cried the woman, when she saw that her children were safe from the burning building, while her husband was striving to beat off his murderous assailants.

"Pile into the cripples," yelled Possum Pete, as, with club upraised, he ran at old Bipus. "Give them old Harry, fellers—kill them! Mash their heads! Don't let up on them."

At this time the young fiends had succeeded in knocking the struggling farmer senseless to the earth, and they only waited to give the unfortunate man a few more unmerciful kicks, when they rushed for the two cripples.

Charley was almost blinded by the smoke when he emerged from the house bearing the child in his arms, and he had barely time to place the trembling being beside its mother when Skinny Myers and Mouser rushed on him.

The brave lad had barely time to rub his hands across his aching eyes, when his inveterate and vengeful enemies assailed him.

Charley realized his terrible position as he heard the ominous cries of the young devils.

He knew that they would show him no mercy; and he did not look for any.

He was aware that his enemies meant to kill him, yet he met the onslaught with a laugh of scorn and defiance, as he cried out:

"Come on, ye infernal pack of thieves. Ye can't make this child squeal. Charge on them, old man. We licked them afore, and we can do it again. Never say die, while there's a leg left under yer."

Old Bipus heard Charley's words of defiance, and he sent forth a cheering response:

"Pile it into them, sonny. Give it to the skunks. Don't back down an inch. Show the snoozers what honest cripples can do."

And the next moment the two cripples were jumping about the farmyard, kicking, striking and butting away at their vindictive opponents.

It was a struggle for life and a struggle for time.

The farm-house and the outbuildings were now one mass of flame; and the cripples and the young robbers knew that ere long the neighbors would hurry to the scene of the conflagration.

The cripples sprang around the yard, dealing blows when opportunity offered, and using every effort and stratagem to evade the thrusts made at themselves.

They were fighting for time, and right gallantly did they hold their ground.

The young robbers, urged on by Possum Pete, strove to overpower the cripples at once.

They meant to kill them ere any assistance could arrive, and then make off with their plunder.

The young thieves had laid their plans for wreaking a fearful vengeance, and they were not to be balked now by the opposition of Charley and old Bipus.

"Hurrah, fellers," yelled Possum Pete; as he struck at the soldier, and sent him reeling to the ground.

"Sock it to them now. Finish the job afore we leave here. Pile on 'em till the daylight is knocked clean out of them. Slash it into the darned cripples."

Charley was hard pressed by Mouser and Skinny Myers, and as he sprang to the assistance of his friend, a blow on the side of the head sent him reeling to the ground also.

"Now, fellers," yelled Possum Pete, as he stood over the prostrate cripples, "let us kick them while there's life in them, then chuck them into the fire, and clear away as fast as we can."

This fiendish proposition was hailed with loud yells, as the young rascals crowded around their victims to put it into execution.

And still not a cry for mercy escaped from the lips of the cripples.

The farmer's wife and children were bending over the miserable man, screaming and crying, and wringing their hands in agony, while every now and then the woman sent forth cries for help.

Then a cry of relief burst from the agonized woman, the children shouted with joy, and the cripples, as they lay at the mercy of their foes, knew that succor was nigh.

The young fiends heard the woman's cry and they paused in their work of murder.

Rushing into the yard, came a huge Newfoundland dog, and at his heels came a brawny Irishman.

The dog sent forth a joyous bark as he sprang to the side of the woman, and commenced to lick the face of the prostrate farmer.

"Murder in Irish!" cried the Irishman, and he glared about him on the scene of outrage and violence. "What's this bloody work going on here? Who'll I pitch into, Mrs. Harmon? Who set fire to the house? Who put your man in that state? Oh, thunder and turf, ye blooded-minded villains, I'll kill the whole of yees."

CHAPTER XI.

BARNEY SHAY TO THE RESCUE—THE STRUGGLE IN THE WOOD—TURNING THE TABLES—THE JUDGE AND THE HANGMAN—MOUSER'S DEFIANCE.

The farmer's wife was too much exhausted to reply to the hurried questions of the Irishman.

All she could do was to point to the young rascals standing over the cripples; and then she fell fainting beside her husband.

"Them rowdies kicked father, Barney," cried the oldest of the children.

"Pile it into 'em, Barney," yelled Cripple Charley, as he strove to gain an erect position.

"Give us a show, old fellow, and we'll knock—" Charley's appeal was interrupted by a kick in the mouth administered by Mouser, which sent him flat on the ground again.

"Tare an' ages," cried the Irishman, as he saw the cowardly kick; "but ye're a pack of young hell-hounds. Sic 'em, Slasher. At 'em, good dog. Aha, ye whelps, I'll let ye feel the weight of this bit ov blackthorn."

As the Irishman spoke, he sprang at the rowdies, followed by the Newfoundland dog.

Possum Pete looked at the Irishman when he first made his appearance on the scene.

"There's only one snoozer," he muttered, "and we can get away with him easily."

Then the young outlaw cast his eye down the road, and, by the light from the burning buildings, he could see men hurrying towards the farm-house.

"Thunders!" yelled the young rascal. "We'll have to peg out, fellers. Skoot it into the woods."

It was just as this order was given that the Irishman and the dog attacked the robbers; while the farmer, who had somewhat recovered from the effects of the robbers' blows, sprang to his feet and joined in the attack.

"Give it to the ruffians, Barney!" cried the infuriated man. "Kill them, the scoundrels. They've ruined me forever."

But the young robbers did not wait for the onslaught of their enemies.

Uttering wild yells of defiance, they dashed over the fence and into the field, followed by the dog and his master.

"Don't let up on them, boss," yelled Cripple Charley, as he sprang to his feet, and grabbed a pitchfork that lay on a heap of manure near by. "Hunt the murdering snoozers down. Come on, Bipus; it's our turn now."

"Pile in, sonny," responded the old man, as he regained a standing position, and joined in the pursuit. "Down with the skunks. They deserve to be roasted in that fire."

Just then some of the neighbors came running into the yard, and a scene of confusion was presented to them.

The farmer's wife was lying insensible on the ground, while around her were her children, crying with fright.

The two cripples and the farmer, their faces covered with blood, were rushing over the fence in pursuit of the outlaws.

"Come on, Hank. Come on, Ike," cried the farmer to his friends. "A crowd of tramps set fire to the house, and nearly murdered us. Come on—come on! There they go to the woods, with Barney Shay after them."

With loud cries of vengeance the men sprang over the fence after the farmer and the cripples, while more of the neighbors ran to the out-houses, in order to make an effort to save the cattle.

The young robbers heard the cries of vengeance that arose on the night air.

They heard the yells of the Irishman close at their heels, as he encouraged the huge Newfoundland to seize them.

Possum Pete urged on his companions to renewed exertion, as he felt that the dog and his master were drawing nearer every moment.

"Leg it, fellows—leg it," he cried. "We're gone suckers if they catch us. Thunders, the dog is on us. Mash his head in."

The hunted robbers turned on the dog and struck at him with their heavy sticks.

The brave animal, with a fierce growl, sprang on Possum Pete, and seizing him by the shoulder, forced him to the ground.

"Mash him over the head, fellers!" yelled the young robber. "Oh, furies, he's biting the whole shoulder off me. Drag him off. Mash him."

"Hould fast, Slasher," cried Barney Shay, as he sprang in among the young robbers. "Ha, ye murderin' spalpeens, take that, and that, and that!"

As the Irishman spoke, he dealt his blows thick and fast about him.

Mouser and Skinny Myers went down before Barney's powerful blows, and the other young robber turned to fly, when the Irishman, with another wild yell, sprang after him.

Possum Pete was still struggling with the dog, and fearful were the yells he sent forth as he struck and kicked, and strove to shake off the brave animal.

Mouser and Skinny Myers were in the act of rising to their feet, when the farmer and his friends burst upon the scene.

One blow from the infuriated man, and Mouser was sent to the ground once more.

"Secure the robbers," cried the farmer, as he sprang upon Skinny Myers. "Now, you infernal thieves, I'll mash your lives out."

Another blow from the deperate man, and Skinny Myers was sprawling beside his companion.

A loud shout of triumph was then heard, as the Irishman, dragging the fourth of the young fiends along by the neck, came rushing back.

The fallen thieves were secured in an instant, while the Irishman pulled the dog off Possum Pete, exclaiming the while:

"Don't tear the spalpeen to pieces, Slasher. 'Tis too good a death for him. Are there any more of the blackguards around, till I take another whack at them? Who in the devil's name are them God-forsaken looking shows?"

As the excited Irishman spoke, he pointed to the two cripples, who with triumphant looks were glaring at their late opponents.

"Don't touch them, Barney," cried Farmer Harmon; "them fellers stood by me all the time; they're just as good as you make them, if they are cripples. Oh, you confounded skunks, we'll make you yell worse 'fore we get through with you."

The last sentence was addressed to Possum Pete, who was crying with pain caused by the wounds inflicted by the dog.

"Lug them back to the house," cried Barney Shay. "We'll give them the finest dose they ever got, the murdering robbers."

The captured thieves were led back to the yard, where an excited crowd of neighbors had now gathered.

Fierce and vengeful were the salutations that greeted them, as the angry men thronged around the farmer, and inquired about the disaster.

The house and the barns were now blazing away; and it was only by desperate efforts that some of the cattle had been rescued.

Of course the whole attention of the angry spectators was now directed to the young robbers.

"Lynch them!" cried one.

"Roast them alive in the fire they made for themselves!" cried another.

"We must make an example of these tramps," said an old, stern-looking man, "or we'll all have our houses burned over our heads."

"Wait a while!" cried old Bipus, as he forced his way into the excited crowd, followed by Cripple Charley.

"Who in thunder are you?" yelled an excited farmer, as he gazed at the blood-besmeared cripples.

"They're sound," replied Jacob Harmon. "They're two tramps I picked up; but they ain't thieves."

"That's so, boss!" cried Charley. "We're honest workers, we are; but these here fellers are the lowest kind of thieves from New York. We let up on them once, and then they came here to lay us all out. They deserve to get roasted this time."

"Friends," cried old Bipus, as he looked around at the excited crowd, and then on the crestfallen prisoners, "I want to say a few words afore we dispose of this here ruffianly gang."

"Go on, old man!" cried Barney Shay. "But don't be all night about it."

"I'm an old soldier," continued old Bipus; "and I'm an old tramp, too. I've traveled all over the country ever since I lost my arms fighting the Indians. This here young feller—who is a regular tramp—and me started out from New York to get to the west. These rowdies set on us in the cars in Jersey, and they laid out the conductor and us, and took my money and papers. They set on Mr. Harmon here when he was giving us a ride; but we beat them that time—gave them a regular dose."

Barney Shay smiled at the idea of the armless man giving any one a "dose."

"Mr. Harmon here will tell you I'm ripping out the truth. Search that young rascal, and see if he hasn't got my papers about him."

As the old cripple spoke he pointed to Possum Pete, who was shaking with fear.

Barney Shay and some of the bystanders examined the pockets of the young robber, and very soon they pulled out the old man's papers, a roll of bills, and a large pocket-book.

"Thunder and lightning!" cried Farmer Harmon, as he grasped the pocket-book; "if that ain't my money. Ye darned thief."

"And there's my stamps and papers," said old Bipus.

"Let's string them up to a tree at once," yelled a farmer. "There's no use in fooling with such stock any more."

"Mercy—mercy!" yelled Skinny Myers.

"Shut up, yer cowardly snoozer," cried Mouser. "Don't show yerself a cur. They won't let up on yer any more for squealing."

"Hold on, friends," said old Bipus. "Tain't right to string them up without a fair trial. Let's court-martial them first."

"I second the motion," cried Barney Shay. "only I make an amendment that we hang them first and try them after."

A roar of laughter greeted Barney's proposition.

"No—no, friends," said the old farmer who had spoken before. "The old fellow is right. Let's give them a trial. And I move that he acts as judge also. What do ye say, friends?"

"Make me the hangman," cried Barney Shay; "and I'll be doing the job while ye're trying them. I'll bet the drinks I get through first."

"A trial—a trial," shouted the excited throng. "Try them ahead," said Barney. "I'll be getting the ropes ready, at all events."

The young robbers felt, as they gazed around at the angry crowd, that their fate was sealed.

"We're gone suckers," muttered Possum Pete. "Let's die game," replied Mouser. "Don't give the snoozers a chance to say we squealed."

"'Tis rough," said Skinny Myers, in a whining tone. "If we beg off, they might let up on us."

"Nary a let up," yelled Barney Shay, as he proceeded to adjust a rope around Possum Pete's neck. "There's nothing but a miracle will save

yees; and we don't have any miracles in America."

"Bring the prisoners over here to the wood," said the old farmer; "we'll try them there."

"'Twill be nearer the gallows, too," cried the excited Irishman. "Pray now, ye devils, if yees ever larnt one, for every mother's son of yees will soon be in kingdom come."

"Go bag your head, ye Irish bogtrotter!" cried Mouser, as he glared defiantly at his tormentor.

"Bogtrotter, am I?" returned Barney. "Faith, me fine gossoon, I'm thinking that ye'd be glad 'his minit to be trotting on a bog. Ye'll be dancing a hornpipe in the air afore yer an hour older, and 'tis myself that will play up the music for yees."

CHAPTER XII.

THE HASTY TRIAL—A DASH FOR LIFE—THROUGH THE DARK WOOD AND OUT ON THE ROAD—WHAT THE CRIPPLES FOUND IN THE BARN.

THE trial of the four young outlaws was very short and the verdict of the jury did not fall sweetly on their ears.

"Guilty of attempted murder and house burning," announced the old farmer, when the witnesses against the prisoners had been heard.

"String them up! Hang the rascals!" sang out the farmers. "There's no use in any more fooling."

"Gentlemen of the jury," cried old Bipus, "'tis clear that the skunks deserve hanging; and if we let up on them, they'll be going around cutting up worse monkey-shines, and bringing disgrace on honest tramps like Charley here and myself. I don't like to take the life of a fellow critter, but I think we'll be doing the country a service by swinging off these scoundrels. Up with them."

"Hi, Mouser," cried Cripple Charley, "don't yer wish yer war back in Burling Slip stealing oranges and bananas?"

The young robber cast a fierce look at Charley, as he said:

"You darned snoozer, I ain't caved yet. Ye darn't hang us. If ye do, ye'll sweat for it. But ye can't make me squeal, anyhow."

"Possum Pete," again roared Charley. "Don't yer wish yer war back wid mother?"

"Go to blazes!" replied the defiant thief. "Ye're a crowd of dirty loafers. And if we had a fair show we'd knock thunder out of yer. Burst through them, fellows; shoot into the wood."

Barney Shay was in the act of placing a rope around Possum Pete's neck, when the young scamp struck him a powerful blow in the face, sprang through the crowd, and dashed into the woods, followed by Mouser.

The Irishman uttered a cry of rage, and dashed in after the fugitives, followed by a dozen of the farmers.

Old Bipus cried out to secure the other two young robbers; and they were flung to the ground and bound with cords.

Mouser and Possum Pete dashed through the woods at a rapid rate, and on after them rushed the Irishman and the farmers.

The young thieves felt that they were running for their lives, and they put forth all the speed they could command.

The enraged pursuers were determined that the rascals should not escape the punishment they so richly deserved; and they tore after them, yelling and shouting as they went.

The young thieves ran along through the dark wood, without having any idea of where they were going; while their pursuers scattered in every direction, in order to head them off should they attempt to break from their cover.

Those who remained to guard the prisoners listened anxiously for some signal that would denote the capture of the fugitives.

And still the flames burst up from the doomed house, throwing a bright glare on the fields around.

"There they go—there they go!" shouted Cripple Charley, as he pointed towards the road. "They're making for that wagon at the gate. The darned skunks will get away after all."

Sure enough the fugitives were making for the wagon; and they reached it in advance of their pursuers, the foremost of whom were more than twenty yards behind.

With shouts of triumph Possum Pete and Mouser sprang into the wagon, the latter seized the reins, and the next moment they were dashing down the road at a terrible pace.

Then there was shouting for horses and wagons, as the enraged farmers ran to where their ani-

mals were fastened in the fields a short distance from the burning house.

"Good Heavens!" cried the old farmer, "the scoundrels have made off with my colts. There's not a pair of horses in the neighborhood that will be able to overhaul them. The devils will drive the horses to death, if they don't upset."

Barney Shay was the first to spring on the back of a horse and start away in pursuit.

In five minutes a dozen wagons rattled away down the road, the drivers urging on their animals at their fastest gait."

An hour passed away, and one by one the pursuers returned to the farmer's house, but they did not bring Mouser and Possum Pete with them.

Oh, how Barney Shay swore with vexation as he rode up to where Charley, old Bipus, and the others stood guard over the two prisoners.

"We'll string these young blackguards up, any way," he cried. "We'll have some satisfaction."

"No—no," cried the old farmer; "that wouldn't be the right thing. Let's hold them till we catch the others and hang them together. They will be caught afore the morning. How far did you go?"

"We followed their track to Manayunk Bridge," replied the Irishman, "and then we lost all sight of them; they disappeared mysteriously."

Following the advice of the old man, the young robbers were conveyed, under guard, to the nearest farm-house, and then they were placed in a barn in charge of Barney Shay, who volunteered to watch them till morning.

The farmer and his family found shelter in the same house, while the weary cripples were also offered sleeping quarters for the night.

In the morning old Bipus and Charley went out to the barn to see how Barney Shay and his prisoners were getting along.

On entering the barn they were horror-stricken to find the Irishman lying on the floor, bleeding and senseless, while not a trace of the prisoners was to be found.

"Thunder and lightning!" yelled old Bipus, "them confounded rascals have escaped again, and they've killed this poor fellow here."

"This is Mouser and Possum Pete's work," cried Charley, as he gazed on the bleeding man. "I tell yer what it is, old man, we ain't done with them skunks yet."

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW BARNEY SHAY WAS LAID OUT—THE INDIGNATION OF OLD BIPUS—HE WANTS TO FIGHT ANYHOW—RECONCILIATION—THE CRIPPLES FIND A NEW CHUM.

OLD BIPUS and Cripple Charley were thoroughly astounded when they saw the Irishman lying before them senseless and bleeding.

They did not know what to make of it.

The first surprise over, Old Bipus commenced to yell like fury, while Charley approached the wounded and senseless man, and laid his hand upon his heart.

"He lives yet, old fellow," cried the boy. "They've only knocked the wind out of him. Yell again, Bipus, and bring the poor devil help."

Bipus did yell, and yell like a fiend.

Very soon all the folks in the farm-house were around the wounded man, and among the first to enter was Jacob Harmon, the man who had suffered so much at the hands of the fiendish tramps.

"What's the matter with Barney?" he cried, as he looked at the bloody face of the prostrate man. "Them darned, all-fired skunks of tramps must have got the best of him somehow. Fetch some water at once."

"Whiskey," said the injured man in a faint voice, as he opened his eyes and stared about him. "Have yees got the dirty blackguards?"

"No, Barney," replied Farmer Harmon. "How did it happen? Are you injured much? Why didn't you sing out for help when they tackled you?"

"Aisy, now, aisy," returned Barney, after he had drained the cup of water that was placed to his lips. "I can't spake a word more till I gets a decent drink, something to revive me; and then I'll tell all I knows, which isn't much, begorra, for they knocked all the knowledge out of me in a jiffy."

"Give him a horn," cried old Bipus. "I'll bet a dollar he's an old soldier."

The farmer's wife hastened into the house to get the whiskey bottle, and the injured man looked up at old Bipus, as he muttered:

"Yer may bet yer life I'm an old soldier, but I ought to be tarred and feathered, and sent to Bedlum for sleeping on the post. God bless ye, ma'am; ye're an angel. There's better luck next time, boys."

And Barney took a long swig of the reviving liquor, and then he drew a long sigh.

"Goes right to the spot, eh, old fellow?" inquired Old Bipus, with a smile.

"Clear down to the toes," was Barney's reply, as he sprang to his feet. "Now, I'm able to bear another beatin' or two with any man in the country. Hould on there till I wash me face, and I'll tell yees what happened me."

Barney Shay was not long in washing the blood from his face; and then it was perceived that he had received two severe scalp wounds.

"They're nothing at all," he cried, as the farmer's wife applied some court-plaster to the wounds. "'Tis me feelings that's hurt more than me head, to think that them imps of Ould Nick got the best of Barney Shay, after all the campaigns and fights he has passed through."

"How did it happen, Barney?" inquired Farmer Harmon.

"I'll jest be after telling yees," replied the Irishman. "Ye see, I thought it an easy matter for the likes of me to take charge of them two gossoons; and, after I saw that they was tied fast I walked up and down the barn a while, thinking of ould times when I was in the war, and standing sintry over some poor divils."

"Bimby I got a kind of drowsy; and, after taking a look at the two thieves, to see that they war safe, I took a stretch near them."

"I had no notion of goin' to sleep; and I only wanted to rest meself a little, for I was bate out. I deserve to be kicked from here to Bedlum, for I'm a mortal fool entirely—so I am."

"To make a long story short as I can, I fell asleep. I don't know how long I was dreaming; but when I awoke the sun was peeping in through the windows, and standing over me, with sticks in their hands, war the four gallows' birds that gave us all the trouble."

"Thunder," cried Cripple Charley. "I told yer, Bipus, that Possum Pete and Mouser had a hand in this racket. How did yer make out then, old man?"

"Make out," returned Barney Shay. "I didn't make out at all, except to get the worst laying out I ever got."

"Fore I could raise hand or foot, or say even bad luck to yees, the divils let fly at me as I lay in the straw; and oh, didn't they swear while they war welting away at me, the blackguards."

"If I could only once get to me feet, I'd think nothing of bating a dozen like them together; but they give me such cracks on the head with their sticks, and they kicked at me so furiously, that I hadn't the ghost of a chance at the villains of the world."

"Kick the sucker's head off," one of them would say.

"Sock it to him, Mouser," another would cry.

"And that's the way they kept hammering at me till I was almost stunned."

"Then they stopped a moment or two, when they thought I was a goner; for be this time I wasn't able to stir, though still I could hear what they war doing; and I made up me mind that the best of me play war to pretend to be kilt outright."

"We've fetched him, Possum," said one of the divils, as he saw there wasn't a stir in me. "Let's make tracks now for the woods."

"Hould on," says another, "till we give the snoozer a couple more sockdolagers."

"Sock it to him, then," cries another.

"And it was a caution the sockdolagers they give me; for 'twas then I must have got these welts in the head that made me senseless."

The Irishman paused for a moment, and his listeners could see that a look of fierce determination was on his face.

"'Twas rough," remarked old Bipus. "'Tis a wonder the scoundrels didn't kill you."

"Kill me!" cried Barney, in an excited tone of voice. "I was never born to have the likes of them kill me; but, by the God above us, I'll have some of their lives—their heart's blood—afore I'm through with them."

"I'm your hair-pin on that lay," cried Cripple Charley, as he grasped the Irishman's hand. "I'd give this other leg of mine to get even with that gang."

"Count me in also," said old Bipus. "I ain't got no arm to lose; but by the eternal, as old General Jackson used to swear, I'd give me head to see them young rascals brought to the scratch at last. Charley here and me will chip in with yer, old comrade, and will start off together after them young skunks."

Barney Shay looked from one to the other of

the cripples for a moment, and a droll smile played on his countenance at the thought of starting out in search of the young outlaws with such strange companions.

Old Bipus saw the smile on the Irishman's expressive face, and he read its meaning at once.

"See here, comrade," he said, "I see by your face that you take us for a pair of helpless cripples, only you don't like to say it. You don't think we're able to take care of ourselves."

"Bogorra, but ye're right there," cried Barney. "I don't mane any offense to yees; but, upon me soul, I'm not so blind that I can't see that ye're the most useless pair that ever started out after a gang of young robbers. Wirra, what are ye talking about? What good would the likes of ye be in a scrimmage?"

Old Bipus' eyes flashed with rage and indignation at the words of the over-candid Irishman.

Advancing towards him with scowling brows, he cried:

"You dirty Irish bogtrotter, cripple as I am, I can kick the whole head off of two like you. Drinks for the crowd, I'll do it now in a square fight."

"Cheese it, old man," said Charley, as he sprang in front of his excited friend. "You're on the wrong tack now; you can't blame Barney for ripping out what he thinks."

"He's a low, cowardly fraud," yelled Bipus. "And I can kick the whole head off of him. Stand aside, Charley, or I'll let fly at you. I'm mad now, I tell ye, and I won't stand no fooling."

Barney Shay folded his arms, and looked at the excited man with a calm and steady eye.

"Old man," he said, "ye can kick away at this head of mine as much as ye like, and I won't lift hand or foot again ye. I am an Irish bogtrotter, as ye call me. But in them same bogs I was taught one lesson I'll never forget, and that is—never raise yer hand to a woman or to one that's not able to defend himself. Some of me countrymen, when in liquor, forgets themselves that way—and bad luck to them for it. Kick away, old man. I didn't mane to offend ye. But kick away."

"He's square, Bipus," cried Charley. "If yer let fly at him, count me out as yer chum. Say, old fellow, what's getting inter yer?"

Old Bipus looked for a moment into the kindly face of the Irishman, as he stood before him with folded arms.

Then the old man turned away, muttering, as the tears sprang into his eyes:

"I'm a darned fool, I am. Charley, you're right. I'm a sucker to pile on a feller like that, for ripping out his words honestly. Give me a good kicking with that stump of yours. I deserve it—I do."

"There's no harm done, old man," cried Barney Shay, as he sprang forward and laid his hand on the old soldier's shoulder. "'Twas all my fault. Let's be friends; and we'll start out together after the young rascals. We'll knock spots out of them yet."

"You're a brick, you are," cried Cripple Charley, as he seized the Irishman's hand. "My pardner here is O. K., only he's a little touchy. Won't we give Possum Pete and his crowd thunder?"

"I'll follow them to the end of the world," cried Barney Shay, in a fierce, determined voice. "I'll not rest easy, or drink another drop of whiskey till I bring them fellows to account for their dirty work. Mark my words for it, some of them will dance on the gallows tree before they're many months or weeks older."

Old Bipus did not say another word; but the expression on his war-beaten face told of the feelings that were uppermost in his heart.

"Now, then," said Barney Shay, "we mustn't

delay a moment longer than we can help. Let's get something to eat, and get ready for the road. We'll be on the track of them scamps afore they know where they are. Won't we give them Bal lyhooly."

Then all hands retired to the farmer's house in order to partake of the morning meal prepared for them.

Barney Shay was the owner of a small patch of ground that he had purchased on receiving his discharge from the army.

He was an eccentric character, full of humor and mischief, ready to fight when imposed on, and well able at that, but never ill-tempered or quarrelsome.

He was a general favorite with the farmers in the neighborhood, as he was ever ready to give a helping hand in the hour of need.

As Cripple Charley looked at the Irishman's honest and manly face, and listened to the droll sentences that fell from his lips, he felt that he would be a rousing companion on the tramp.

Old Bipus soon recovered his usual good humor, and he also looked on Barney as one whom he could trust in the journey through life.

Then the Irishman was an old soldier, and that was a great recommendation.

CHAPTER XIV.

MORE OF THE YOUNG THIEVES' WORK—BARNEY SHAY'S TERRIBLE OATH—OFF ON THE HUNT—WHO'S TO BE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF.

It did not take long for the two tramps and their new friend to make preparations for starting out in quest of the young robbers.

When breakfast was over, Charley and old Bipus bade adieu to the farmer and his family, and accompanied by the Irishman, they started down the road, having with them provisions for a day's tramp.

Barney Shay received a promise from his neighbors that they would look after his cattle until he returned, and it was only necessary that he should stop for a while at his humble dwelling in order to procure necessities for his journey.

As Barney approached the house, he whistled for his dog, but the animal did not come at his call.

"That's queer," he said, as he hurried his pace; "he always comes to meet me at this fence. I sent him home last night after the row to keep house for me till I got back. There's something wrong."

And there was something wrong.

When Barney Shay reached the yard outside his house, he found the faithful dog lying dead before him, and on approaching the door, he discovered that it had been broken open.

"Thunder and turf!" exclaimed Barney, as he stood on the floor and looked about the room; "the born fiends have been here and gutted and destroyed everything. And look! by all that's wicked, if they didn't try to set my little place on fire."

Charley and old Bipus saw at once that the young thieves had attempted to complete their work of destruction by setting fire to the place.

A lot of bedclothes had been piled in the center of the room, and they were half consumed.

Everything about the room was broken or smashed, and all the valuables that could be taken off by them were missing.

Barney Shay looked around the room for some moments without saying a word.

Then he went out into the yard, looked once more at the dead animal, and proceeded to the stable.

A cry of rage burst from him as he saw a

splendid young colt lying dead in the stall, while the dam near by was disabled forever, the fiends having cut her legs and neck in a fearful manner.

When the Irishman realized the terrible outrage that had been committed on his dumb favorites, he fell on his knees, and holding up his hands, exclaimed, in a voice that thrilled his hearers:

"By the great God that made me, but I'll have my revenge for this. Here on my bended knees I make a solemn oath, that I'll never rest if it was to take me forever, until I kill the fiends that have done this cruel wrong. I will follow by night and by day, till I tear their vile hearts from out of their bodies. Oh, ye villains and plunderers, I'll make ye suffer for this, so help me God!"

Old Bipus and Cripple Charley were awe-struck while they stood gazing on the vengeful face of the injured man, and listened to the terrible oath that he registered.

They felt that it was no idle threat; and they knew that henceforward Possum Pete and his companions would have an untiring and relentless enemy on their track.

"Bear up, old comrade," cried old Bipus. "It might be worse than it is. They came near killing yourself."

"Kill meself!" exclaimed Barney. "I wouldn't care a straw for that—for we can all die but once. But, oh, the hell-hounds! to destroy the poor dumb animals that never hurt mortal man. The creatures that I loved so fondly. They were wife and children to me. My pets, my darlings. They'll never run to me again to feed them, and to caper around me. They were fonder of me and more loyal to me than if they were human beings. But I won't grieve over them now. I'll make after their murderers at once. Wait till I get a little money for the road, and I'll be with yees."

Barney was calm enough now, as he set about getting ready for the journey—calm, to all outward appearance, but oh, the blood was boiling in his veins, and his heart was bursting with rage.

One more look at the dead dog, one more hurried visit to the stable where his pets were lying, and he was striding down the road beside his companions.

"The neighbors will see to them poor creatures," he remarked, as he looked backward once more. "I'll never lay me eyes on them again. Come on."

They tramped along in silence for some time, each busy with his own thoughts, and each forming, or striving to form, some plan of action, to guide them in pursuit of the treacherous and cruel young robbers.

"They darn't face back to York," thought Cripple Charley; "for the Jersey fellows will be on the lookout for them. I bet they'll skoot out west."

"They'll skoot for some of these swamps and woods, in Jersey or Delaware where the tramps hang out in gangs," muttered old Bipus. "They won't have cheek to show their ugly mugs in any of the big towns, after the noise that'll be raised about their doings."

"See here, comrades!" cried Barney Shay, aloud. "I've been thinking over this thing in me own mind, and I want ye to promise me one thing afore we go any further together."

"What's that, Barney?" inquired old Bipus.

"I must be boss of this job. Ye fellows must be said and led by me."

"What rank did yer hold in the army?" inquired old Bipus.

"It don't matter what rank I held," returned Barney, "I'll be captain of this squad, or I'll

have to shake yees, and go on me own hook. We must have discipline if we work together, or else 'twill be all here and there with us. I don't want to put on any airs; but I tell yees we'll have hot work afore this campaign is over, and t'won't do to start out going every which way. You must give me command."

"Let's cast a vote for it," cried Charley. "I vote for Barney Shay to be the boss of this company."

"Ye're a pretty snoozer, ain't yer?" said old

Bipus, turning to the boy. "What der yer want to go back on yer old chum for, say? Republics is ungrateful."

"And so is cripples," replied Charley, with a laugh. "Come, old man, don't be putting on too many lugs. Yer can't hold a candle to Barney here, and yer knows it. His head is clear, and yours ain't, for you're getting your mad up all the time about nothing. I votes for Barney Shay, and no drawing back."

"Fire ahead, Charley," cried old Bipus. "I

don't care a cuss who commands this crowd, so long as we get square on that gang."

"That's all settled, then," said Barney. "Now, we'll jog along for awhile, till I forms my mind on what we're going about. And then we'll be after those young villains like a thousand of bricks, and we'll kill them, ere we give over the hunt."

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